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ABSTRACT

Although 6 million adults in Britain are studying at any one time, survey findings confirm continuing underrepresentation of people in lower socioeconomic levels. This paper suggests that widened participation in education and training is necessary to improve competitiveness and economic success and to enable all to have an equal opportunity of sharing in that success. Much of the skill, knowledge, and experience needed to bring underrepresented groups into learning exists in countless neighborhood and local projects and campaigns and in large-scale initiatives. An alternative to targeting groups is to identify their shared characteristics and to adopt systems that reward and not penalize institutions that make special efforts to recruit and retain such students. The Further Education Funding Council's (FEFC) Funding Methodology is a formula funding system that relates levels of resource to levels of delivery and creates a common currency for the whole range of its further education offer. The FEFC is challenged to make this formula fit the goal of widening participation. Its Widening Participation Committee holds out the promise that changes will be proposed in the FEFC Funding Methodology to extend opportunity for those currently excluded. Suggestions have been made for increasing the number of units available for the four elements of the learning process: entry, on program, achievement, and compensating factors. All providers and funders have roles in the process of widening participation. (Contains 83 references.) (YLB)

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ED 423 447

Widening Participation

Routes to a Learning Society

Routes to a Learning Society

A Policy

Discussion Paper

Tony Uden

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Widening Participation

Routes to a Learning Society

A Policy Discussion Paper

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Preface

NIACE is a federal body reliant on its membership for the knowledge and thinking power needed for the development of policy ideas. This paper has benefited from discussion at our Executive Committee and Council, from the advice of members of NIACE's staff and from the comments and suggestions of individual colleagues from colleges, trade unions and local education authorities.

I owe special thanks to Dick Corbridge, Head of Manchester's Adult Education Services and to NIACE's Senior Research and Development Officer, Veronica McGivney. Those familiar with Veronica's own writing will recognise her enormous contribution to Chapter 1. I also need to thank Alan Tuckett, Director of NIACE, whose suggestions have influenced all parts of the paper and whose support makes these things possible.

The responsibility for the views expressed (and for any errors and omissions) remains with me on behalf of NIACE.

Tony Uden
March 1996

Introduction

This paper is triggered by the establishment by the Further Education Funding Council of a committee to consider 'widening participation' in Further Education. The establishment of the committee attests to the fact that barriers of class, gender, ethnicity and poverty continue to stand in the way of the development of a Learning Society with a comprehensive post-school education and training system. (The fundamental 'who pays wins' division of Britain's school system lies outside our scope.)

The briefest glance at participation statistics relating length and success of initial education to the likelihood of continuing learning – in any form and in any sector – confirms the truth of the old adage, 'If at first you don't succeed, you don't succeed'.

And yet the need to mobilise the potential for learning in the population as a whole has never been greater – for the individual facing increasingly complex domestic, financial and health decisions, for an economy aspiring to be highly skilled and 'knowledge-based', for a society wishing to devolve power and decision-making to ever more localised levels.

These kinds of consideration add urgency to the long-held aspirations of organisations like NIACE to see genuine equality of opportunity in learning, which is the necessary precursor to equality of opportunity in employment and other spheres.

Thus NIACE has long taken the view that 'who participates?' is one of the key questions in education. As an organisation concerned to promote the interests of individual adults as learners a focus on this question helps to maintain, through many legal, organisational and funding changes in the system around us, NIACE's role as an advocate for those people who persistently miss out on post-school learning opportunities.

Mass participation in learning is an essential ingredient for:

- a fulfilled life for individual women and men
- a successful and developing economy
- a participative democracy.

This case is argued and pursued through all our activities – books, journals, conferences, action research and by involving our members constantly in debate and activity. Not least NIACE seeks to intervene in public debate when the interests of adults as learners are concerned or even threatened. Recent examples would be our effort to change the proposals which emerged as the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), making representations about the position of asylum-seekers in education and training, attempting to improve the conditions under which unemployed people are permitted to study. Some efforts are more successful than others.

One way of entering and furthering debate has been the publication of Policy Discussion Papers which contribute to and possibly broaden discussions initiated elsewhere. Examples are *Towards a Learning Workforce*, inspired by debates in industry around such concepts as 'the Learning Organisation'; *An Adult Higher Education*, seeking to argue for an acceptance and positive development of the real role of Higher Education in providing for a mainly mature student population; *The Learning Imperative*, which made the arguments for the inclusion of all members of the workforce within the scope of the National Targets for Education and Training; *The Will to Learn*, which set out the conditions under which the Individual Commitment initiatives of the Employment Department might be made to reach all potential learners.

The changes which have come over post-school education and training in recent years show gains and losses from the NIACE perspective. The sheer numbers of adults in Higher Education must be counted a gain, but the poor, inequitable and worsening structure of student support for mature and part-time students detracts from this achievement. The incorporation of FE Colleges was accompanied by the securing of a national base of provision, usually free at the point of delivery, in basic skills, ESOL and for those with special needs or on benefit, which in its volume and quality would have astonished the literacy campaigners of the 60s. Similarly the drive for expansion in FE has led to an opening up of many more opportunities for adults across the curriculum. Yet the concomitant losses borne in the local authority sector have led to contraction, higher fees and losses of infrastructure which have had dire consequences for groups like older people, those living in remote areas, those wishing, for whatever reason, to study without accreditation.

The establishment of the FEFC's new committee to consider ways of widening participation beyond traditional student groups is one more challenge to NIACE to make its case openly, publicly and as clearly as it can for a learning society which offers opportunities to all its citizens and to illustrate how much is already known about the ways in which this can be done. This Policy Discussion Paper will rightly and inevitably focus on the issues which will be of concern to the FEFC's Kennedy Committee (popularly named after its Chair, Helena Kennedy QC) and Chapter 4 is mainly concerned with a rationale for possible changes in the FEFC Funding Methodology. However, we will argue that there are issues outside the current FE sector remit which will influence the success or failure of that sector in widening participation and that the health of adult learning opportunities outside that sector is equally important in the construction of a 'Learning Society'.

This publication is therefore addressed not only to that Committee, though we hope its members will read and be influenced by it, nor just to those many individuals and bodies who will, we hope, wish to give evidence to the Committee but to all those who wish to join with us in constructive debate about how learning opportunities may be extended to all adult citizens at times in their lives and in ways which suit them; a development which we believe will ultimately be beneficial to all of us.

Chapter One

The Learning Community

It is estimated that some 6 million adults in Britain are studying at any one time. Some 3.5 million of these are on formal courses of work-related or role-related study, courses concerned with progression to further or higher education; basic, compensatory or special education or general, non-certificated education courses. Another 2–3 million are engaged in less formal but not necessarily less serious learning activity often self-directed, and using a wide variety of media (HMI, 1991; Sargant, 1991; NIACE, 1996).

Major changes in the learning population have taken place since the 1980s. These include a strong shift towards certification accompanied by and in part reflecting a marked drop in participation in traditional areas of general, non-certificated adult learning. There has been a sharp increase in the numbers of adult learners in Further Education Colleges. The transfer of some 27 per cent of the old Local Authority adult education programmes to the new Further Education sector at the time of incorporation and the dominance of output-related measures in that sector have both accentuated and exaggerated these trends. The number of adults in Higher Education has also rapidly increased during a period of overall expansion, and in both sectors adults now constitute a majority of students.

Between 1982 and 1992 the number of mature home first-year students in universities, polytechnics and colleges more than doubled (from 139,800 to 319,400) and rose by 15 per cent between 1991 and 1992. A further 42,700 adult students were studying at the Open University in 1992.

> *There were more mature students entering higher education in 1992 (319,400) than young students (281,600). The proportion of mature students increased from 42% of all home first-year students in 1982 to 53% in 1992. Full-time students make up just over two-fifths of this total (DfE Statistical Bulletin 16/94).*

Thus, despite all the obstacles of family, work and meagre financial support, adults form the overwhelming majority of part-time and a large and increasing proportion of full-time students.

In 1991 51 per cent of students in FE Colleges were aged over 25 and a further 10 per cent between 21 and 24.

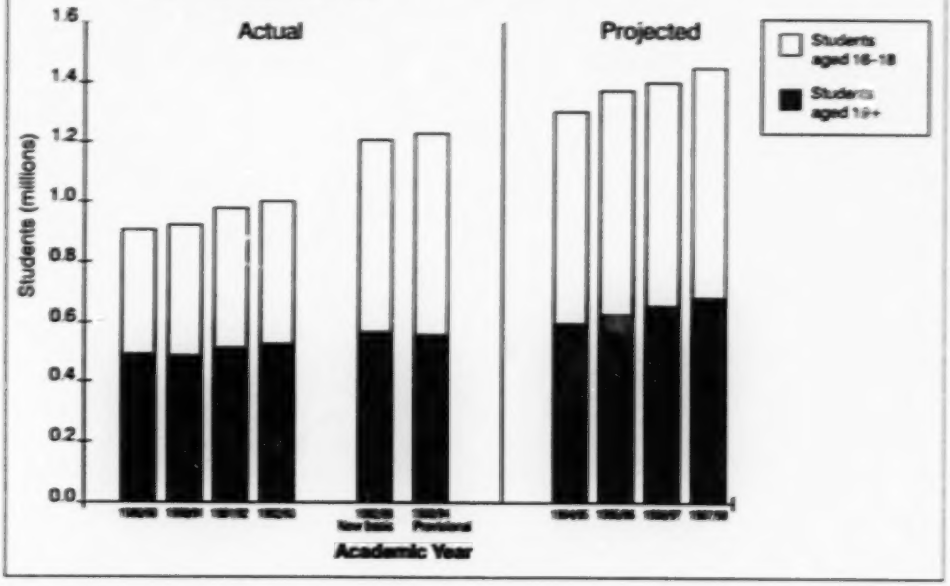
Table 1 Student Enrolments in FE Colleges, November 1991

Age	below 18	18–20	21–24	25+	Total
Enrolments	0.5m	0.3m	0.2m	1m	2m
Percentage	23	17	10	51	100

Source: *Education for Adults in FE Colleges 91–92: A report by HMI*, DFE ref 405/92/NS.

'Traditional' 16–18-year-olds now form less than half the full-time equivalent students in Further Education Colleges and this trend is set to continue.

Figure 1. Further education students (full-time equivalents), England, 1989–1990 to 1997–98



Source: DFE and OFSTED, *The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995/96 – 1997/98*, HMSO

The Further and Higher Education sectors are now accessible to many people who, comparatively recently, would not have formed part of their student populations.

Nearly half of all students over the age of 25 in higher education do not hold standard entrance qualifications (Metcalf, 1993). These include many of the women who now make up nearly 50 per cent of all students in the sector and a high proportion of the mature students from ethnic minority communities.

The demand for learning is certainly there, and educational developments such as CATs, APEL, Open College Networks, Access courses, modularisation and the greater openness of the Further Education sector to adult students, have helped many more adult learners to cross institutional and sectoral boundaries (although studies by McGivney, 1992b; 1994b, suggest that progression routes are not yet as clear and developed as they might be). In particular, more flexible

entry criteria and Access courses have played a considerable role in helping increasing numbers of mature women and people from lower socio-economic groups to enter higher education. There were an estimated 36,000 learners registered on Access to HE programmes in the UK in 1994–5 (HEQC, 1995). Although figures on progression to HE are difficult to identify, as many of these learners do not go through the UCAS procedure, UCAS themselves calculate that there were some 23,000 applicants to HE from Access to HE and Foundation programmes in 1994–5 (UCAS, 1995). More mature students progressed to degree programmes in 1995 from Access to HE programmes than from A-levels, GNVQs and NVQs combined (UCAS, 1995). At the same time, there is growing evidence that drop-out rates on Access to HE programmes are increasing rapidly as the financial situation of Access learners continues to worsen. Participation (measured by learner registrations) may continue to increase while achievements (measured in successful progression to HE) may well begin to decline.

Table 2 Qualifications of home domiciled students on entry to full-time and sandwich first degree courses, England, 1989/90 to 1993/94

Academic year	1989/90 actual	1990/91 actual	1991/92 actual	1992/93 actual	1993/94 provisional
Percentage entrants with					
A level	77	76	73	68	62
BTEC	9	9	10	12	14
Other qualifications	14	15	17	20	24
Total entrants (thousands)	**135**	**150**	**169**	**206**	**214**

Source: DFE and OFSTED, *The Government's Expenditure Plans 1995/96 – 1997/98*, HMSO

The overwhelming majority of Access and Alternative entrants (students without standard A-level qualifications) left school at the minimum leaving age or a year after (Webb *et al.*, 1994). However evidence collected in 1991 seems to demonstrate that this is the effect of the targetting of these opportunities to certain groups and that, without that intervention, the socio-economic profile of these 'second chance' students becomes the same as that of the 18-plus cohort of HE entrants (Black Access Federation).

Motives for Returning to Learning

Studies suggest that there are three main, overlapping motives for engaging in learning – vocational, academic and personal interest and development. A typical finding (Tight, 1991) is that part-time mature learners in higher education claim to be taking courses for a mix of instrumental, self-developmental and subject interest reasons.

Like younger students, the immediate aim of many adult students may be personal development and expressed in terms of academic achievement, but their long-term aims are to improve their career prospects: 'Regardless of course or institution, vocational motives predominated' (Munn *et al.*, 1992). This accords with most of the evidence available. Economic conditions are encouraging more and more people, young and mature, to seek education and training as a means

of gaining qualifications and more secure employment. In an earlier study, work-related and vocational reasons for learning were the most frequently cited by adult learners (Sargant, 1991), with interest in subject and personal development taking second place. (Of course it is not always easy or helpful to separate the two. Is the wish for a job one enjoys a personal or a vocational aspiration? How many of our personal goals can be reached without a sufficiently financially rewarding job?) More recently NIACE found that:

> *When people who have studied recently are presented with various possible motives, intellectual inquiry and job prospects are equally likely reasons for adult learning. Two people in five say interest in the subject (40%) attracted them to the most recent course they undertook, and as many say they wanted to get a recognised qualification (38%). Adult learning may help boost the job prospects of people at different stages in their careers. One in five wishes for help in either getting a job (18%), in their current job (22%), or to improve their promotion prospects (20%). A further one in five say they enjoy learning generally (20%)* (MORI, 1994).

Members of minority ethnic communities tend to express particularly strong instrumental motives and to pursue mainly vocationally specific subjects (Sargant, 1993). Women taking the Access route also exhibit strong instrumental motivations:

> *for the women the ultimate goal was relatively simple – paid employment and all they associated with it: status, economic independence, etc. All the women in our sample placed a significant emphasis on the function of higher education as a route into paid employment* (Maynard and Pearsall, 1994).

Yet the more general study shows that:

> *women are slightly more likely than men to be motivated by interest in the subject (43% against 36%) or by enjoyment of learning (24% against 15%). Among men, meanwhile, getting a recognised qualification (40%) is more often a motivation than interest in the subject (36%)* (MORI, 1994).

In higher education a more sophisticated analysis of students shows that motives vary according to the group. McNair (1993) has identified four broad categories of mature students in higher education: deferred beginners, usually in their 20s, who return to study full-time and differ little from younger or full-time students; returners, mainly women in their 30s, who want to make changes in their career or life direction after a period of paid work or domestic responsibility; 'developers', people between 30 and 50 who are entering higher education to enrich and extend their knowledge, skills and understanding within a chosen career pattern; and 'enrichers', people who are 'adding new strands to their education and career development outside the frame of immediate employment'.

The most popular areas of study chosen by adults reflect mainly instrumental motivations. The NIACE MORI survey (1994), for example, showed that most people are interested in courses like business administration, computing and languages. An earlier NIACE survey (Sargant, 1991) found slight social class differences in subject choice, with the highest socio-economic groups interested in arts and cultural subjects; middle groups in languages, business and professional subjects (perhaps illustrating differences in what these groups anticipate to be 'vocationally' useful), and working-class students often involved

in domestic and DIY skills. The same survey showed that working men tend to be studying engineering, computer studies, business, management and administration, foreign languages and subjects leading to vocational qualifications; non-working men were studying languages, engineering and computer studies. Women working full-time were likely to be studying work-related subjects such as shorthand, typing, office training, computer studies, business and administration, nursing, midwifery, social work; those not working were primarily interested in foreign languages, office skills, typing, English language and literature, social work/services, handicrafts, cookery, arts.

Differences in the subject choices of men and women are apparent at all stages of education. Within further and higher education, male students are involved in a much wider range of subjects than women learners, who are still clustered within a relatively restricted number of study areas: notably the arts, humanities, education, medical-related and multi-disciplinary courses in higher education; clerical and secretarial, hairdressing and beauty, health and social care, business and administration, creative arts and design in further education. Typical findings (e.g. Bourner *et al.*, 1991) are that women part-time HE students are concentrated in education, biological sciences, social studies and humanities, whereas men predominate in all other subject areas. Areas that are particularly male-dominated are mathematics, physical sciences, engineering and technology, architecture, planning and building trades.

Table 3 Gender of part-time undergraduates

Subject	Male %	Female %
Engineering*	99	1
Mechanical engineering	98	2
Electrical/electronic engineering	97	3
Metallurgy/materials studies	96	4
Quantity surveying	95	5
Physics	92	8
Chemistry	79	21
Computer studies	75	25
Mathematics	69	31
Business studies	67	33
Law	61	39
Art/visual studies	59	41
Education	46	54
Biological sciences	39	61
Social studies	38	62
Humanities	29	71

* Not elsewhere specified

Source: Bourner T. *et al.* (1991) *Part-time Students and Their Experience of Education*, SRHE.

There are also gender differences in the qualifications held. About 35 per cent of women of working age have no qualifications compared with about 28 per cent of men. Within this figure there are age differentials: 20 per cent of women aged 16–24 have no qualifications compared to 54 per cent of those aged 45–59 (Meager and Williams, 1994). Among women in ethnic communities, few aged 45 and over hold any post-school qualifications (Sargant, 1993).

Four-fifths of all NVQs gained by women are in the clerical and secretarial area while men's awards are spread across a wider set of occupations. Women are poorly represented in the NVQ awards in the craft and technical areas. They are also concentrated in the lower levels (1 and 2), making up three-quarters of all awards at level 1. Even in occupations where most workers are women (clerical work, service industries and sales) proportionately more men than women hold high level vocational qualifications (*Labour Market Quarterly Review*, February 1993).

Nursing, teaching and high level RSA qualifications are held mainly by women, whereas HNDs, HNCs, BTEC Highers, ONDs/ONCs and trade apprenticeship certificates are held predominantly by men. This has led analysts to conclude that women face difficulties both in gaining entry to male-dominated occupational areas and in getting their skills formally recognised if they do gain entry (Centre for Labour Market Studies, 1994). The challenge of 'widening' women's participation therefore remains despite the surface evidence of the achievement of equality in numbers.

Learning Outcomes

Research findings on the correlations between academic performance and age and previous qualifications are too diverse to be conclusive. Although there is some evidence that mature students are slightly more likely than younger ones to leave further and higher education courses before completion, the research findings are not consistent (see McGivney, 1996). Moreover, a number of reports indicate that mature higher education students without 'standard' entry qualifications such as A-levels achieve better results than the standard-aged cohort. For example, a study of students in the polytechnic sector (Bourner and Hamed, 1987) indicated that 'non-standard' entrants achieved the best degree results, while a more recent analysis at Plymouth University has revealed that mature entrants aged over 25 with no qualifications or qualifications other than A-levels gain the best degrees (*Times Higher Education Supplement*, 22 December 1995).

However, as Woodley (1984) has observed, the relationship between age and performance is complex: it is not linear but varies according to sex, subject studied and qualifications on entry. The evidence available suggests that adult learners perform well when studying arts, social science and vocational subjects but are less successful when studying science and technology subjects. Part-time students are less likely than full-time ones to complete programmes of study. Women students tend to outperform male students, who are generally more likely than female to withdraw from certificated courses before completion (McGivney, 1996). Some studies (e.g. Singh, 1990) also indicate that completion and success rates vary according to ethnic background.

Characteristics of the Learning Population

Important and encouraging though the trends are, recent surveys show that the increased numbers of adult learners entering further and higher education do not seem to have made any significant impact on the *overall* composition of the

adult learner population, which remains unrepresentative. The evidence is both persistent and consistent. Since 1980, NIACE quantitative and qualitative surveys of adult participation in education and training have shown that the majority of adults in education and training are those from higher socio-economic groups and those with extended initial education (ACACE, 1982; McGivney, 1990; Sargant, 1992; NIACE, 1994). According to one survey, 42 per cent of people in socio-economic class AB compared with 17 per cent of those in DE reported themselves as learners, while 46 per cent of those who left school at age 18 or older enrolled in some learning, compared with 13 per cent of those who left school at the minimum leaving age (Sargant, 1991). The later MORI survey suggested that you are twice as likely to study as an adult if you are middle class and more than twice as likely if you stayed on at school after 18. Similar findings have been reported in other surveys of adults in education and training (Woodley *et al.*, 1987; Training Agency, 1989; Gallie and White, 1993; Felstead and Green, 1993; SCPR, 1993), confirming Sargant's contention that:

> *The major factor affecting participation continues to be social class. The upper and middle classes stay at school longer, go on to post-school education at a higher rate and are then much more likely to return to continue their education as adults than the working classes* (Sargant, 1991).

Table 4 Adult participation in study nationally by social class and terminal age of education

	Total	*Social class*				*Terminal age of education*			
		AB	C1	C2	DE	Under 16	16–17	18+	Still at school/ studying full-time
Still studying (at school or full-time)	3	4	7	1	1	–	–	–	100
Studying now (not full-time)	10	16	12	11	6	5	13	17	
Have studied in past three years	16	22	18	17	10	8	20	29	
All studying currently/ recently	29	42	37	29	17	13	33	46	
Studied longer ago/ not studied since completing full-time education	71	58	63	71	84	87	66	55	

Source: Sargant, N. (1991) *Learning and Leisure*, NIACE.

Another common finding is that learners are more likely than non-learners to be employed (Social and Community Planning Research, 1993). McGivney (1992) has commented on the irony that:

> *unemployment, which might be expected to act as a stimulus to seeking education and training, appears to act instead as a powerful deterrent. All the evidence suggests that people in work are far more likely than the jobless to participate.*

Government statistics indicate that people, especially men, from an unskilled, manual working background are conspicuously under-represented in further education (DFE, 1993), and that, despite the expansion of higher education, the overall social profile of students has not substantially changed:

> *Statistics show a persistent failure to recruit from manual social classes. In 1979, students with parents from the top professional and intermediate occupations accounted for 62% of the intake. In 1988 the figure was 69%* (Brookman, 1991).

According to UCCA and PCAS figures, over three-quarters of HE students have parents from non-manual occupations, with 64% from the highest two social classes. In 1990 only 1% of students had parents in unskilled occupations. 'Success' in education does genuinely 'cascade down the generations'.

Table 5 Highest qualification held[1]: by socio-economic group of father, 1990–1991

	Professional	Employers and managers	Intermediate and junior non-manual	Skilled manual and own account non-professional	Semi-skilled manual and personal service	Unskilled manual	All persons
Degree	32	17	17	6	4	3	10
Higher education	19	15	18	10	7	5	11
GCE A level	15	13	12	8	6	4	9
GCSE, grades A–C[2]	19	24	25	21	19	15	21
GCSE, grades D–G[2]	4	9	7	12	12	10	10
Foreign	4	4	4	3	2	2	3
No qualifications	7	19	18	40	50	60	35

[1] Persons aged 25–59 not in full-time education
[2] Or equivalent
[3] Includes commercial qualifications and apprenticeships

Source: GB Central Statistical Office (1994) *Social Trends 24*, HMSO, table 3.22, pp52.

According to Tight (1991), part-time mature students are also 'overwhelmingly middle class', though many of them (Woodley *et al.*, 1987) may be 'new arrivals', using study and the gaining of qualifications to mark the completion of a social class change.

Table 6 Employment status of part-time students

	Current or most recent employment (%)	First full-time employment after school (%)	Father[a] (%)	Mother[a] (%)	Spouse[c] (%)
Non-manual					
Professional[b]	46	23	17	11	36
Manager/employer	15	4	23	8	11
Other non-manual	31	46	15	38	35
Manual					
Skilled manual	7	16	25	9	11
Semi-skilled manual	1	5	12	11	4
Unskilled manual	1	7	8	22	3
Total	101	101	100	99	100

[a] At the time that the respondent left school.
[b] Normally requiring qualifications of degree standard.
[c] Excludes those to whom the question was inapplicable.

Source: Bourner T. *et al.* (1991) *Part-time Students and Their Experience of Education*, SRHE.

Within the HE sector there are clear divisions along lines of class and (not unrelated) 'standard'/'non-standard' entry routes. Although the proportion of students with 'non-standard' entry qualifications has risen across the system as a whole since the mid-1980s, they remain concentrated in the new universities and in colleges and institutes of higher education. These have approximately a 50 per cent greater share of students in their mid-20s or older. They also have a greater diversity of students. New universities take a higher proportion of lower socio-economic groups (30 per cent) than the old universities (19 per cent) (PCAS, 1992; UCCA, 1992). In 1990, there were twice as many black and Asian students in the then polytechnic and college sector as in the old universities (PCAS, cited in Metcalf, 1993).

In his comparison of an old and a new university, Ainley (1994) comments on the predominance of white students at the former and the extent to which it acts as a 'social and cultural training ground for the middle classes'. In contrast he found that the new university reflects the working class nature and ethnic diversity of inner city areas.

The Missing Groups

There is, therefore, a powerful connection between socio-economic status and educational opportunity and achievement in Britain. NIACE survey findings confirm those of other British research in revealing a continuing under-representation of people in the lower socio-economic categories (C2 and DE) in all forms of post-school education and training. Though there have been some advances, particularly by women and ethnic minority adults, the profile of non-participants remains largely the same as it was in 1990 when *Education's for Other People* (McGivney, 1990) was published, with the following (overlapping) groups still widely under-represented across the whole range of post-compulsory education and training:

- unskilled manual workers
- people without qualifications
- unemployed people
- some groups of women (e.g. those in socio-economic groups DE; lone parents)
- some ethnic minority groups (e.g. refugees)
- older adults (aged 50-plus)
- people with special needs and disabilities
- people with literacy and/or numeracy difficulties
- ex-offenders.

This is not to suggest that all the groups listed are totally excluded from formal education and training, but that they experience varying degrees of disadvantage in gaining access to all forms of provision and in achieving successful learning outcomes. Additionally, the rapidly growing numbers of part-time and temporary workers are largely excluded from employer-provided training. For some groups, the situation has actually worsened in recent years, while others have made virtually no advance.

Comparison of the MORI poll findings in 1994 with a similar poll conducted in 1990 shoiws that the number of older people benefiting from education and training is reducing rapidly just at a time when they are a growing proportion of the population (Sargant, 1990; NIACE, 1994).. The working through of the effects of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) has led to a significant shift from uncertificated to certificated courses on the part of most providers; and successive reductions in local government funding have hit Local Education Authority education for adults particularly hard . Most older people have little interest in gaining further qualifications or in narrowly vocational learning. They are also unlikely to be willing to travel long distances to colleges when locally delivered classes are withdrawn, and many find the increasing costs of learning (especially outside the FEFC umbrella) an insurmountable barrier.

Although people with disabilities are in general considerably less well qualified than other members of the population and 48 per cent have no qualifications, they are still under-represented on government training programmes (Meager and Williams, 1994). Reliable data on the number of disabled students in further and higher education are not available. However, according to Metcalf (1993), a Labour Party survey in 1990 found that only 0.3 per cent of higher education students were recorded as being disabled, although they account for 14 per cent of the adult population and 3% of the 20–29 age group.

The effects of the FHE Act (1992) on students with learning difficulties and disabilities have been described as a case of 'snakes and ladders'. Older learners and those with severe/complex learning difficulties have been disadvantaged by the increased drive for certification. However, for those who can pass that hurdle funding has been placed on a secure footing, with 57% of colleges reporting increased enrolments and 42% of LEAs an increase in funding (Sutcliffe, 1996).

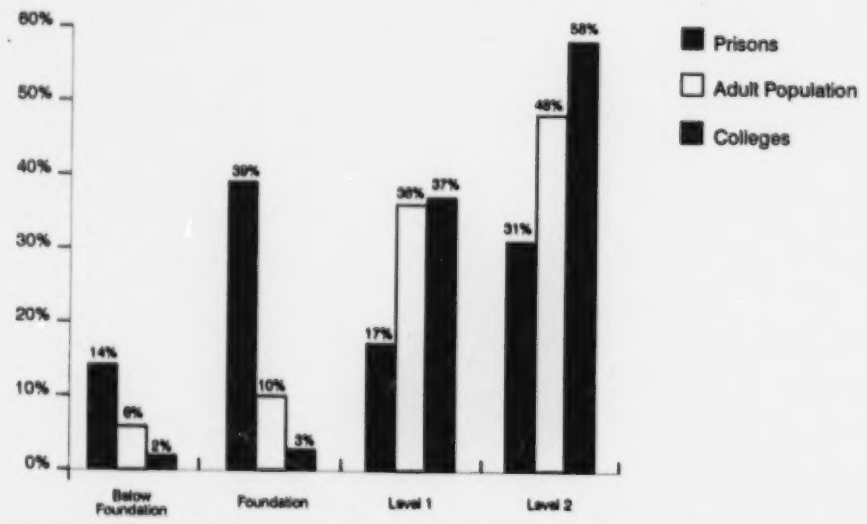
Although about 6 million adults have some difficulties with writing and numeracy (ALBSU, 1994), this group is also under-represented on government training schemes. In the summer of 1993, people with literacy and numeracy needs accounted for only 8 per cent of those starting 'Training for Work'. Of

those with such needs who do gain access to training schemes, only about 30 per cent achieve a qualification compared to the average of at least 40 per cent (Meager and Williams, 1994).

With ethnic minorities there has been a continuing failure to achieve equality of outcome. In proportion to their numbers in the population, more black and Asian people than white people stay on in full-time education and they are generally well-represented on Government training programmes. Yet they are less likely than white people to gain a job or a qualification at the end. Unemployment rates for the black and minority ethnic population remain about twice as high as those for the white population (Meager and Williams, 1994). Both McNair (1993) and Sargant (1993) have also pointed out that ethnic minority adults in post-school education receive less financial support than white people from public sources or from employers.

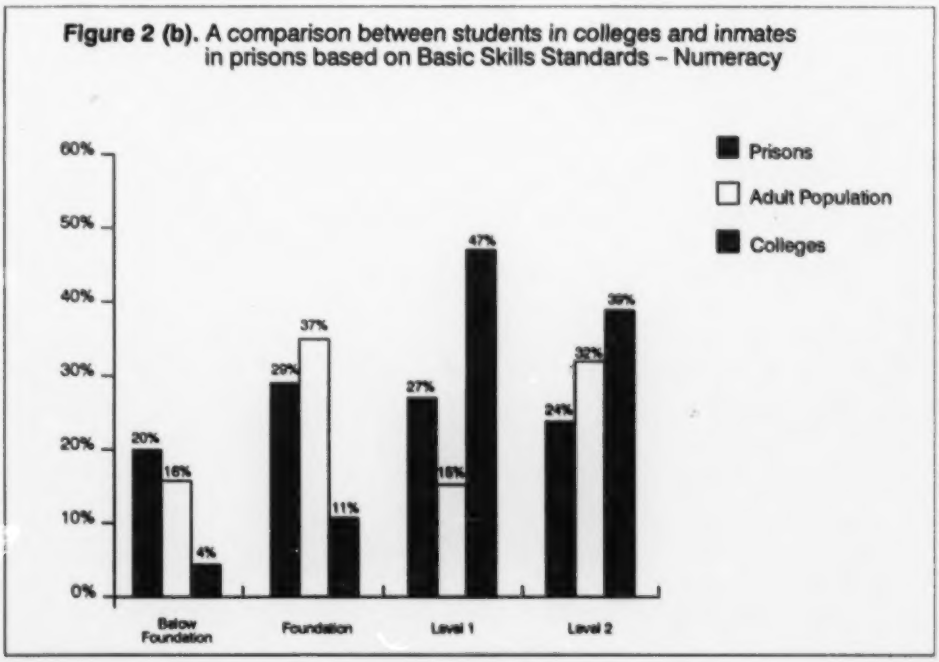
Ex-offenders (mainly young males, with those from black and minority ethnic groups over-represented), are also less well-educated and qualified than the average: 45 per cent of the prison population aged under 30 have no qualifications and a significant proportion have problems with basic skills.

Figure 2 (a). A comparison between students in colleges and inmates in prisons based on Basic Skills Standards – Reading



Source: Basic Skills Agency (1994) *Basic Skills in Prisons, Assessing the Need*

Figure 2 (b). A comparison between students in colleges and inmates in prisons based on Basic Skills Standards – Numeracy



Source: Basic Skills Agency (1994) *Basic Skills in Prisons, Assessing the Need*

This group, with its related problems of very poor job prospects, low basic skills and lack of qualifications, presents a major challenge.

Chapter Two

Why Should Participation be Widened?

Economy, Workforce, Family and Community

A generalised 'liberal consensus' around notions of 'widening participation', 'improving' staying-on rates, the National Targets, etc. masks considerable lack of clarity about the motives for bringing more people into education and training and the ultimate goal of such efforts.

If, for example, the only motive is to improve the skills of the workforce in order to improve competitiveness then the recent massive loss of learning opportunities for retired people is not a worry. If the purpose is to improve the skills of current employees then the continual denial of opportunity to the unemployed by harsh interpretations of the 16/21 Hour Rule is not a problem. If the purpose is to train only that part of the workforce which will actually be called upon to deploy higher level skills in the near future, then the virtual exclusion of a significant proportion from the new National Targets could be a rational decision.

On the other hand, if a truly competitive economy needs to be able to exploit the potential of the whole workforce (as an acceptance of the Aims as well as the measurable elements of NTETs would imply), if education and training equip people for other roles in society of equal value to paid work, and if personal fulfilment and 'the pursuit of happiness' could ever be reinstated as acceptable social objectives – then the purposes and goals of widening participation in education and training become different and the exclusion of certain groups becomes unacceptable and a significant problem to be overcome. Only when our efforts are turned in these directions are we truly attempting to 'widen' as distinct from merely increase participation.

The figures (see Chapter 1) illustrating the continuing link between social class and staying-on rates and the massive over-representation of the product of private education in universities (and the older ones at that) clearly show the possibilities of increasing participation without meaningfully widening it.

Even the almost universal welcome for improved staying-on rates at 16 and 18 may need to be questioned.

Have the implications of expanding higher education threefold been seriously considered? Teaching methods and curricula have changed perforce but have the changes been positive developments or reluctant accommodations? Has more really in the end meant worse? The proposal to levy a kind of 'flat tax' on new entrants recently made by Vice-Chancellors may have been meant only to spur Government into action, but it revealed an almost frightening lack of

understanding that 'participation' is not only about numbers and that even the most hard-pressed system should be managed within considerations of social justice and a deliberate spreading of opportunity.

Is staying on in continuous education the best route to achievement for everybody? What should 'unemployed' 17-year-olds be learning to prepare them for the enterprise culture and the knowledge-based economy? Would a return to full employment reverse the trend towards staying on at 16 or would there still be no jobs for this group? Certainly the reluctant presence of undermotivated young people in Further Education (refugees from the disappearing 16–18 job market) can have a deleterious effect on completion and success rates. A true 'Lifelong Learning' system would give an equal place to those whose motivation to learn comes later than 16 (and some things really are better learned later, on the basis of experience, by all of us). It would offer work and part-time learning for those young people whose culture of 'growing up' makes full-time study seem a second-best to having a job. It would offer parity of esteem to learning achievements wherever and whenever gained.

One of the Government's aims is 'that good quality education should be available to adults to help them improve their qualifications, update their skills and seek advancement in their present career or in a new career' (HMSO, 1991) and the purpose of the National Targets is now stated as 'to improve the UK's international competitiveness by raising standards and attainment levels in education and training to world class levels' (National Targets for Education and Training [revised], 1995).

But there has long been concern among educationalists that the means to these instrumental ends may not be as obvious as at first appears:

> *We do not wish to underrate the value of increased technical efficiency or the desirability of increasing productivity; but we believe that a shortsighted insistence on these things will defeat its object. We wish to emphasize the necessity for a great development of non-technical studies, partly because we think that it would assist the growth of a truer conception of technical education, but more especially because it seems to us vital to provide the fullest opportunities for personal development and for the realisation of a higher standard of citizenship* (Final Report of the Adult Education Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction, 1919).

> *New industries spring up and old ones are revolutionised. Consequently, any attempt to train for too specific a mode of efficiency defeats its own purpose. When the occupation changes its methods, such individuals are left behind with even less ability to readjust themselves than if they had a less definite training* (Dewey, 1916).

There are, then, three important and distinct areas of uncertainty or dispute:

- what is the range of legitimate purposes for a publicly supported education service?
- which of us are a part of and which excluded from the much-cited 'workforce'?
- are job-related training and 'vocational' qualifications the best routes to a successful competitive economy for the 21st century?

The lack of agreement and clarity about the aims and objectives of education in its broadest sense is not unimportant. At its simplest levels it can leave institutions unclear about:

- who they are providing for
- what they should be providing
- the criteria by which their efforts will be judged.

It can lead to whole sections of the community being excluded, intentionally or unintentionally; to inappropriate education for individuals; to role confusion for organisations.

Much of the recent massive expansion in Higher and Further education has been justified by a perceived need to improve the skills and thus the competitiveness of the UK workforce. The adoption of National Targets for Education and Training has the same aim.

It is certainly true, as the figures compiled by OECD and others show (OECD, 1994; World Competitiveness Report, WEFD and IMD, 1995) that the UK lags behind its main competitors in most comparable areas of participation and qualifications gained. Indeed, even the achievement of some of the main Targets would leave us behind where our competitors are *now* and they will not stand still to allow us to catch up.

NIACE agrees that it is necessary to widen participation in education and training in order to improve the UK's competitiveness and economic success and also **in order to enable all to have an equal opportunity of sharing in that success**. The position of Government and some other bodies is clearer on the first than on the second part of that proposition.

Firstly, then, why does the goal of improved competitiveness and economic performance imply a widening of participation to take into education and training increasing numbers from the groups who traditionally stay outside?

In the White Paper *Competitiveness: Helping Business to Win* (HMSO, 1994) the Government states 'We have to give all our people – not just some of them – every opportunity to give of their best, from their very first day at school to the end of their working lives.' This aspiration does not, however, seem to carry through into practice. The definition of 'the workforce' adopted by NACETT, for example, is very much narrower than 'all our people'. For NACETT the workforce is the sum of those currently employed and the Lifetime Targets refer only to them. There is no place for the unemployed in our Lifetime Learning Targets and the persistent refusal of Government to make study a positive outcome from RESTART interviews and to take other measures like the re-instatement of something like the short-lived 'Learning for Work' programme to encourage learning among the long-term unemployed reinforces tendencies to exclusion and marginalisation. NIACE has argued for some years against these narrow workforce definitions, which are in danger of neglecting the needs of large numbers of people essential to even the narrowest, short-term definition of business success, for example potential women returners to the labour market who need learning opportunities *before* they return and millions of workers in the new 'flexible economy' (see *The Flexible Workforce: Who pays for training*, 1995 and NIACE's response, NIACE, unpublished, 1995). Women now compose the

majority of the new entrants to the labour market and it is predicted that 80 per cent of the increase in the total workforce between now and 2006 will be women joining or re-joining the labour market. The idea of 'the workforce', therefore, needs to be widened beyond those currently employed and include all those who wish or intend to work.

➤ **Efforts to involve more of the workforce in education and training should aim at the unemployed and potential new and returning labour marker entrants, not just those currently in work**

The nature of the active workforce is also changing. Some 5 million people (nearly a quarter of the UK workforce in work) are part-time or temporary workers. Full-time permanent employees now make up less than two-thirds of that workforce. Additionally, 3.2 million people (12.5 per cent of the workforce) are self-employed and 600,000 of those are part-time (CBI, 1995).

Long-term trends are for a continuing slow decline in the overall number of full-time employees and a steeper rise in the number of part-timers (Institute of Employment, 1994). The number of temporary workers remained steady over the decade to 1993 but is now projected to rise (CBI survey, 1994).

Eighty-five per cent of part-time workers are women, as are 56 per cent of temporary workers. From 1984 to 1993 the numbers of women in employment grew by 16 per cent, and 40 per cent of these were part-time.

➤ **Efforts to involve more of the workforce in education and training should aim to include the large and growing numbers of part-time, temporary and self employed workers**

The Government places increasing emphasis on employer-led training and there is a general agreement across the political spectrum that employers must continue to form, with the state and individual investment, one of the three pillars supporting the training system. Employer investment in training has held up well during the recent recession and is estimated at £20–25 billion per annum.

However, it is becoming clear that much of this investment has failed to take account of the changes in the real labour market outlined above. It is in danger of missing the mark and in effect contributing to a *narrowing* of participation.

Most training 'solutions' remain predicated on the notion of full-time, permanent employees who will remain with one employer for most, if not of all, of their working lives. There are obvious and understandable reasons for this. It must be broadly true that the return on an employer's investment in training will be greater the longer the contribution of the trained employee into the firm.

Employers are, therefore, more likely to invest in the training and development of their full-time (usually male), permanent employees, who in fact represent a declining proportion of the active workforce. Within this group they concentrate on the higher-level skill and managerial grades and upon younger rather than older workers (CBI, 1994). Where they do invest in the training of part-time and temporary workers, it again tends to be at higher skill levels and, among part-timers, to be concentrated on those directly recruited rather than those bought in from agencies. One effect of this is a continuing discrimination against part-time

and temporary *women* workers.

Nor should it be assumed that the self-employed can safely be left to look after themselves by investing in their own training. The dispersion of incomes which has anyway been growing over the eighties and nineties is at its most extreme among those encompassed in the catch-all phrase 'self-employed', and 'men are over-represented among the higher-earners, while women form a bigger proportion of the other extreme' (McGivney, 1994).

Thus the reliance on the voluntary efforts of employers to meet the training needs of the whole workforce is not proving universally successful. The CBI's view seems to understate the case:

> *Whilst flexibility of employment itself is a welcome trend in a fast changing economy, there is a risk that a significant proportion of the population – women in particular – will find themselves on the periphery of the labour force unless ways and means can be found to enable them to update their skills and competencies* (CBI, 1994).

➤ **Ways must be found to ensure that employer investment in training is genuinely available to all of the UK's actual workforce**

NIACE has argued elsewhere (*Adults Learning*, 1995) that, while a growing proportion of the workforce will be deploying the skills needed in a high-tech, high-skill economy, this is by no means the whole story. There remains a significant demand for low-skill or virtually no-skill jobs. The growth of the service sector, especially personal domestic services, is one factor leading to a deeply divided workforce in terms of both skills and rewards:

> *Britain, in short, is regressing to the income distribution and lifestyles of our Victorian forebears. Above stairs a few enjoy a life of increasing luxury, their wealth scarcely taxed and their unearned income growing rapidly, Below stairs there is a ballooning class of the newly 'flexible', their incomes falling in real terms and their opportunities for education and training increasingly diminished. The rich are locked in a virtuous circle where more begets more. The poor in a vicious circle where less begets less* (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 1994).

Another divisive force is the progressive de-skilling of some occupations, often accompanied by casualisation, brought about by advances in technology.

It is these groups, without a 'proper' employer or needing no training (beyond perhaps basic health and safety instruction) to do the present job or self-employed at income levels incompatible with personal investment in training, who will fall right outside all current training and development activity, except, perhaps, for the most progressive of Employee Development Schemes.

And yet it must not be assumed that some sort of Darwinian selection has ensured that those at the bottom of the skill and income heap are necessarily those with the least to contribute. A successful, competitive economy will need to 'release the potential' of all its members. To leave 20 per cent (or 30 per cent or 40 per cent) of people with their potential untapped, whatever the skill requirement of their current occupation, would be a grave error.

➤ **Opportunities for development must also be offered to those in unskilled or de-skilled occupations**

Secondly, without entering here into the vexed arguments about the worth and credibility of NVQs, it is necessary to challenge some simple assumptions about the relationship between training and jobs and for educationalists to revisit the arguments about the undoubted but complex relationship between learning and work.

Current growth in the UK economy is concentrated in small and medium-sized enterprises and often in new occupations using new skills. These currently 'new' skills are no more likely to be accurate predictors of tomorrow's skill needs than were those of earlier periods. Indeed, the pace of change is such that many currently employed young people are likely to be working in fields so far unimagined before the end of their working lives. The ability to learn and to adapt, to be inventive and to take initiative will be as important as current specific job skills. 'Core skills' are a good start but need to be liberally and generously interpreted. We need to move away from the prescriptive and narrow approach to vocationalism currently gaining new ground each day, not just so that we may lead fuller and happier lives but **for the sake of the economy**.

At its simplest this is the widely understood argument that the real intentions and aspirations of students cannot always be simply 'read off' from the title of a course, nor, in the case of many returning to learning, should the student's first explicitly stated intention always be taken at face value. For example, a large-scale survey conducted by NIACE for one LEA indicated that, although people may undertake courses primarily for interest and enjoyment, many end up using the skills and knowledge they acquire to improve their economic position, to assist them in their employment, domestic and parental roles and to contribute to the local community. The survey also revealed conclusively that participation resulted in better health and well-being, particularly for elderly people, those with disabilities and those living in rural areas, in high rates of progression to certificated courses and significantly higher levels of confidence and self-esteem (McGivney, 1994).

We also need to rebut the deeply regressive idea that there can be knowledge which is somehow essentially and permanently 'useless'. Sometimes this is simply a purblind notion of what constitutes real work – as if all those with English and History degrees fuelling the massively expanding communications and entertainment industries are not really working and would have done better to study mining or train to be managers in the textile industry. At other times it is a failure of imagination in the face of the possibilities of human ingenuity and creativity. At all previous periods in our history, 'new skills' have generated new economies to make use of them and only a failure of nerve is likely to prevent this being true over and over again.

Much of the current argument about the value and need for 'parity of esteem' of vocational qualifications skirts around these issues, though the market, imperfect though it is, does seem to sort it out. Employers *expect* the state to provide general education and training, and in the end (despite the prominence given to individual employer statements of support for the Government's much-lauded NVQs and GNVQs) they are prepared to buy it. The lifetime earning returns of those with 'academic' qualifications continue to outstrip those with 'vocational'

qualifications. Indeed, a 1994 study quoted by Green and Steedman shows no lifetime income return for those with 'vocational' qualifications below the level of HNC/HND over and above those with no qualifications at all (Green and Steedman, forthcoming). Many employers in fact continue to be sceptical about aspects of the NVQ/GNVQ system, which can seem elaborate and unwieldy. A recent TEC survey, quoted in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 8 March 1996, reports that:

> *Employers are found to have little or no understanding of general national vocational qualifications and many – particularly from smaller organisations – are still confused over national vocational qualifications .*

On the other hand most, employer investment goes into job-specific training not leading to full qualifications but valuable (in the simplest interpretation of value) to them in the short term.

> *Employers are prepared to invest in training employees to meet their own needs. They will only invest in broader training – to help meet national needs – if they are offered incentives to encourage them to do so. In practice, the NVQ system does not offer much in the way of such incentives. Individuals will only invest in achieving qualifications if they believe that employers will accept them. At present, in general individuals do not see evidence of employer acceptance of NVQs, and, therefore, few are prepared to devote their own time and resources to the attempt to achieve them* (Senker, 1996).

➤ **Government must continue to be the source of investment in general and 'academic' education and training which forms the foundation on which new skills can be developed.**

A 'knowledge-based economy' will be based on new and therefore unpredictable knowledge. The recent merger of the Departments for Education and of Employment has set alarm bells ringing in Higher Education circles. Where these signal fears of a threat to privilege and elitism there will be little sympathy. However, there may be a genuine danger that an over-emphasis on the vocational – interpreted as the proper commercial and industrial exploitation of knowledge, skills and invention (an area in which the UK could indeed usefully improve) – will be at the expense of the freedom to explore knowledge with no obvious immediate commercial application. The *Times Higher Education Supplement* (July 14 1995) comments:

> *Crassly implemented, these changes could indeed damage and diminish pure science, disinterested scholarship, creativity, study for its own sake. And it is vital that these should survive and flourish for, as the so-called information revolution gains ground, they are the raw materials of the future.*

Of course inventiveness and creativity are not the monopoly of Higher Education, and these intellectual 'raw materials' must be encouraged and allowed to develop wherever individual women and men are thinking and learning.

➤ **All investors in education and training must be encouraged to take a long-term view of the range of skills and knowledge which could be required in a successful economy in the next century.**

Thirdly, we should all remember that a successful, competitive economy is desirable because it will enable us to build a stable society in which all are able to learn and develop their capacities to the fullest extent, contribute to family and civic life and enjoy creative leisure. It is not an end in itself. The education system is the route to all these goals and must not be stripped down to serve only the needs of the economy and those whose contribution is currently made through paid work.

Currently, however, despite the admirable view expressed in the Ministerial Foreword to a recent DfEE Discussion Paper that 'Lifetime Learning is not just about the economy and competitiveness. It is also crucial to our national culture and quality of life' (DfEE, 1995), almost all official encouragement to wider participation and higher achievement is couched in terms of increasing the competitiveness of the UK economy.

There are countervailing currents:

> *Investment in education and training is now recognized as one of the essential requirements for the competitiveness of the Union* as well as for the cohesion of our societies (European Commission, 1994; our emphasis).

The figures in Chapter 1 clearly illustrate that some of the groups most likely to be totally absent from any kind of post-school learning are those which, in other contexts, give rise to much anxiety: those who leave school at the earliest opportunity; the long-term unemployed; linguistic minorities; the unqualified and unskilled; ex-offenders.

It is difficult, and often expensive, to bring into education and training the least motivated or the most disillusioned or those with barriers of language to overcome, but the dangers of allowing a growing marginalisation are also evident and their consequences are expensive. In some ways the UK economy and developing attitudes to social welfare, law and order and employment may be seen to be shadowing the United States, where de-regulated labour markets and their consequences 'are as economically and socially dangerous as the long-term unemployment they are supposed to avoid' (OECD, 1994). And the Council for Industry and Higher Education has noted: 'A society aspiring to be increasingly demanding, market-driven and competitive is deservedly unstable if it does not cater specifically for those otherwise liable to be left out' (CIHE, 1993).

It is possible to overcome the barriers. Imaginative schemes for offenders pioneered by NACRO and others and the DES funded REPLAN programme, which successfully brought many thousands of unemployed people back into education, show what can be done. But these efforts often remain at the level of geographically- or time-limited experiment, while the operation of funding mechanisms which reward 'achievement' by standard measures (qualifications) rather than distance travelled; unimaginative training schemes which make demeaning assumptions about the job destinations of unemployed people and the denial of learning opportunities which the current operation of the 'actively seeking work' requirement brings about, only add to the dangers of disillusion, exclusion and marginalisation.

➤ Participation in education and training is a key factor in efforts to restore social cohesion, and the integration of 'hard to reach' groups should be one of the

goals built into funding mechanisms, mission statements and performance measures.

It is, however, not only at the margins that education and training have roles which are not confined to competitiveness and business success. Without entering into partnership with the 'doom and gloom' school of journalists and popular sociologists, we cannot but be aware of the increasing strains on many of our most fundamental institutions. For often quite objective reasons, many people are finding family roles as parents, carers, etc. harder to fulfil, while, at the other end of the scale, few people seem to be equipped with even the basic knowledge which would make the concept of 'active European citizenship' anything but a politician's or Eurocrat's airy phrase, quite detached from the reality of most people's lives.

There is no reason to believe that people will be 'naturally' equipped to be successful in their role as citizen or carer, or in the myriad voluntary roles and activities which are essential to an active, participative democracy. Nor can these skills be sensibly inculcated through some 'core curriculum' in the early years.

➤ **Education and training must be offered in ways which make it accessible to all who wish to improve their knowledge, skills and understanding in all kinds of life roles, not only in work-related skills.**

The loss of learning opportunities in later life is perhaps one of the most serious consequences of the current over-emphasis on an instrumental, vocationally confined post-school education system. These opportunities are disappearing, except for the relatively wealthy (and even they have to live in the right place!), just as the numbers and proportion of older people in the UK are rising rapidly. There is no reason in terms of simple social justice why these people should be excluded from the pursuit of knowledge and skills for use in their homes, families, communities or simply for pleasure. Additionally, it is evident that mental activity and social interaction lessen the need for dependence on social services, and clinical evidence now seems to show (*British Medical Journal*, April 1995) that participation in education really does retard the onset of Altzheimer's and related conditions.

➤ **Steps should be taken urgently to restore and then enhance the education and training opportunities available to older people.**

Learning for its own sake and the pursuit of hobbies, sports, arts, crafts, interests and obsessions are among the hallmarks of civilised society. In an age of mass communication and the rapid 'domestication' of IT applications much of this activity will be by non-traditional means, but education suppliers, public and private, still have a major role to play. The 'pursuit of happiness' may not be part of our constitution but neither is it in any way a less worthy activity than any of the others which education and training provide. Many people will be able to pay the full cost of such activities but barriers of cost should not continue to exclude others, for example long-term carers or unemployed people, from enriching lives which may in other ways be impoverished.

➤ **The provision of purposeful leisure activity, accessible to all, should be re-instated as a legitimate purpose of educational provision.**

Chapter 3

How Much Do We Already Know?

One way of approaching the problem of lack of participation is through targeting of the kinds of groups identified in Chapter 1 as the least likely to fit easily into current systems of organisation and delivery. Another way, elaborated in Chapter 4 with special reference to the possibilities of reform within the current FEFC funding structure, is to identify shared characteristics of these groups and to adopt systems which reward rather than penalise institutions which make special efforts to recruit and retain such students.

From a provider's point of view the kind of common characteristics we mean are:

- a lack of resources for course fees and related expenses
- a lack of confidence
- a need for greater investment in attracting to provision
- a need for greater guidance and initial support
- a need for greater on-programme tutorial support
- a need for greater personal support (e.g. childcare, benefit advice)
- a need for courses to be organised at times and in places that suit individual circumstances but which may incur greater costs for the providing institution
- a greater likelihood that students will leave the programme early through social and economic pressures
- a lesser likelihood that the student will achieve conventional forms of learning success such as qualifications as quickly and in the same proportion as other learners.

Some of these characteristics (which can be sub-divided into those which make people indifferent or even hostile to the notion of learning and those which hinder participation by people who would otherwise consider it) are wholly or mainly susceptible of a funding solution. The next chapter will deal mainly with education and training which falls within the remit of FEFC, but even if FEFC were to accept all our suggestions, for those whose needs fall outside that umbrella the resourcing problem will remain acute. It is not only a problem for individuals but has consequences for society and the workforce, for example when older people and women returners, wishing to put a toe in the recreational learning water before taking the full plunge into certificated study, are deterred by financial considerations (see Chapter 2).

So, not only will changes in funding methods be needed but new or restored resources must be found for those struggling outside the main funding streams. Only a restoration of community-based learning opportunities at an affordable rate will enable some groups to benefit. The current divisions in post-school education have not led to 'separate but equal' development but, as the figures for participation of older people show, to inequality and injustice. The way forward surely lies through a re-integration of the FE curriculum and through a public

and legally binding assertion of the real meaning of an 'adequate' provision of further education for all adults. This must now be part of the wider debate about an integrated lifelong learning policy incorporating the widest possible spread of participation.

The Government's 'Lifetime Learning' paper and the Cresson 'White Book' are timely contributions to the debate. But the debate is not just beginning. Pioneering college principals, community adult educators, inspired voluntary organisations have shown, time and time again, that there are strategies which work in involving wider and wider circles of people in learning. The Tomlinson Committee of FEFC was, for example, deluged with evidence, argument and examples of good practice when it sought advice on ways of deepening and widening participation of those with learning difficulties and disabilities.

We will, therefore, argue in this chapter that much of the skill, knowledge and experience needed to bring under-represented groups into learning already exists. What is needed is the dissemination, adoption and further development of those intellectual resources and their incorporation into mainstream learning activity.

The London Experience

Between 1969 and 1987 (the years of major surveys of participation) the profile of the adult student body in London was turned around by a combination of policies:

- widening the curriculum
- sensitivity to cultural and language factors
- removing financial barriers
- flexible and generous childcare and transport arrangements
- tailoring programmes to meet identified needs
- working in conjunction with established community-based groups.

In 1969 only 4 per cent of Adult Education Institute students in employment were semi- or unskilled manual workers, though these groups made up 31 per cent of inner London's employed population; 70 per cent of the students were in employment and only 4 per cent were retired or unemployed; the two-thirds of the inner London population who had left school at the earliest opportunity were also poorly represented in the adult student body (ILEA, 1969).

By 1986/7 the service had substantially succeeded in its aim of offering priority to previously excluded groups, especially those who had benefited least from initial education:

- 41 per cent of adult education students had no formal qualifications (23 per cent nationally)
- 15 per cent were unemployed as against 2 per cent nationally
- 45 per cent were from black and other minority ethnic groups which made up only 20 per cent of inner-London's population (ILEA 1987).

ILEA had thus been one of the first organisations to grasp the key fact that the expansion of participation which took place in the fifties and sixties had not effectively *widened* participation beyond those who were traditional or habitual learners *and had then done something about it.*

A forthcoming publication will celebrate this achievement and chart the changes which have come about in the years since 1987. It may well be time to revisit some of the lessons.

REPLAN

Between 1984 and 1991 the Department of Education and Science and the Employment Department (together with the Welsh Office in Wales) sponsored the REPLAN programme designed to increase and improve the learning opportunities available to unemployed adults.

Using a variety of methods – demonstration projects, research and publications, programmes of staff development and national and regional newsletters, but above all by the development of small regional staff teams to deploy those tools to best effect – the programme sought to place and keep the 'unemployed' on the agendas of all education and training providers.

The REPLAN regional offices became the focus of networks encompassing staff at all levels and in all sectors. The programme sought to identify the barriers which stood in the way of participation and to propose practical routes by which they could be overcome. During the life of the programme the absolute numbers of unemployed people identified as being within the further education sector (broadly defined as encompassing both colleges and community-based services) rose consistently (NFER, 1990).

REPLAN was a response of Government to specific labour market conditions – the growth of unemployment and, within that, of long-term unemployment. In its openness about the kinds of learning it would encourage it was also an early and tentative reaction to the evolution of a new kind of labour market within which flexibility and adaptability would be basic to employability. As such it was one of the most imaginative of Government initiatives and probably one of the most successful in the never-ending stream of schemes in this area. Those responsible for initiating the scheme and letting its professional staff to a large extent have their head have much to be proud of (and those who closed the programme, saying that its work was done, probably still have their heads in the sand).

Of course the programme was officially restricted to 'the unemployed' but as one review of this work (FEU/NIACE, 1990) tactfully put it:

> *It was clear from the beginning that the kinds of courses and activities appropriate for the unemployed (strictly defined) might be suitable for other groups of 'unwaged' people, including women without recent involvement in the labour market, who were also likely to benefit from learning activities aimed at raising levels of confidence and extending knowledge and skills into new areas of competence.*

Indeed, as the REPLAN programme has developed, as new innovative approaches have been tried and tested, and as the labour market context itself has evolved, there is now widespread recognition of the benefits likely to accrue from the extension of this kind of provision to larger numbers of the under-employed, unskilled and under-educated – and to other groups of adults in need of education and training.

REPLAN found itself focusing on certain essentially practical themes of programme organisation and curriculum implementation:

- marketing and outreach
- collaboration and networking
- guidance, counselling and learner support
- curriculum delivery: promoting flexible learning
- assessment, accreditation and progression
- evaluation, integration and staff development.

The vast weight of published material and the knowledge and experience acquired remain on our shelves and in the heads of individuals.

Adult Learners' Week

The often-cited 'lack of motivation' of currently under-represented groups and their lack of response to the recruitment and publicity efforts of colleges and centres may have more to do with the ways providers think it appropriate to 'sell' education and training and the ways in which potential students are expected to indicate their interest than with any innate deficiency in the people themselves. People who don't read a lot are not attracted by brochures; people who think that 'Education's for Other People' (as the title of one of Veronica McGivney's studies in motivation has it) will not beat a path to college doors, however relevant to their needs the curriculum on offer actually is.

For the past few years NIACE, the relevant Government Departments and a huge coalition of radio and television companies, industrial sponsors, education and training providers have mounted a celebratory Adult Learners' Week. Much of the externally generated funding for this comes from the European Social Fund and must be expended on the long-term unemployed.

A centrepiece of the week is a national freephone helpline which offers advice on education and training issues, staffed by advisers drawn from the careers service, TECs, the Benefit Agency, the Employment Service and Citizens' Advice Bureaux.

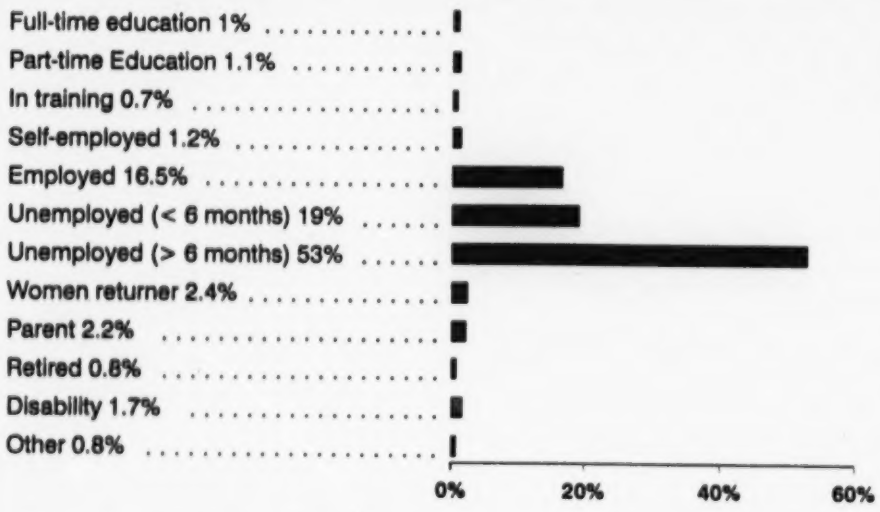
The helpline number is promoted in a number of ways not usually associated with (or available to) providers of education and training. In 1995 for example:

- information went to all unemployed claimants with their giro-cheque
- the 14 ITV companies provided 12 hours of air time for stories, news slots

and social action programmes
- Channel 4 mounted a series on Mentoring backed with its own helpline
- BBC TV showed a number of sketches on the theme of Second Chance
- the helpline was featured on other popular TV programmes
- a poster and flyer campaign took in Job Centres, supermarkets, libraries and national and local newspapers.

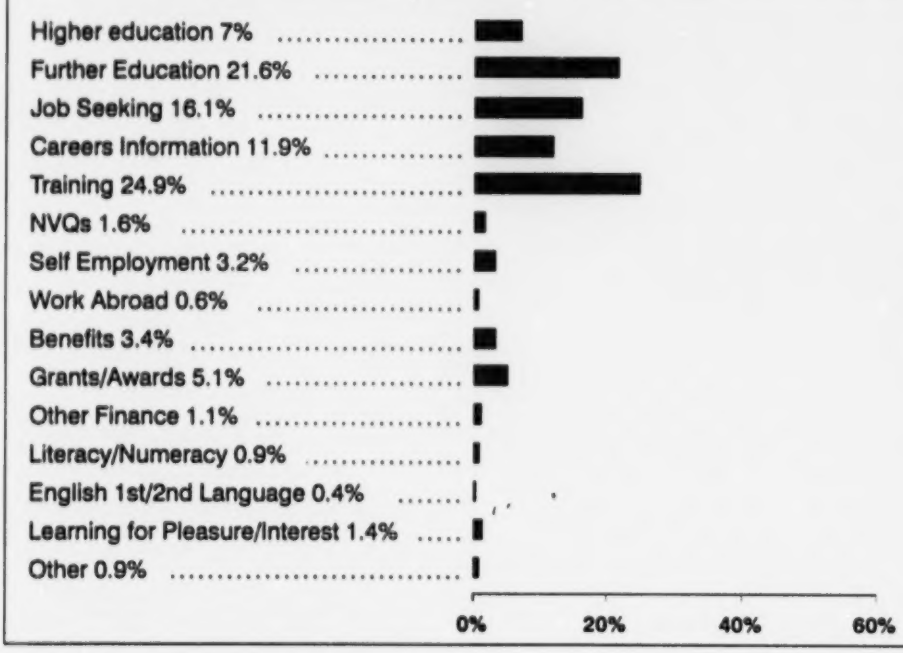
The results of targeting and of using 'normal' channels of communication are startling when you compare helpline enquirers with the usual profile of adult learners:

Figure 3 Adult Learners' Week 1995
Helpline enquirers were asked 'What is your present situation?'



Source: NIACE (1995) *Adult Learners' Week Report*

Figure 4 Adult Learners' Week 1995
Helpline enquirers were asked 'What are you interested in?'



Source: NIACE (1995) *Adult Learners' Week Report*

UNISON: Return to Learn

Many trade unions have extensive and imaginative education programmes for their members, as well as core training programmes for activists. UNISON, the country's largest trade union, through its Open College initiative involves huge numbers of its often part-time, low paid, public service workers in education and training.

Of particular interest is the highly successful Return to Learn course (R2L) which was established specifically to address the acknowledged problem that women, often in low paid, part-time work, and black union members were not participating in the union activist training then on offer. The scheme also explicitly drew on the long tradition of the Labour movement in supporting liberal adult education, residential learning opportunities and, more recently, through initiatives like 'WORKBASE'[1] basic education (UNISON, 1995).

The courses are a combination of distance learning, study circles, personal tutoring and residential schools. All are run in places and at times planned to be convenient and non-threatening to the students and, increasingly, students are offered peer group support and advice by former students. Core skills of writing, investigating, analysing and working with figures are offered in stage one and can be built on in stage two. Accreditation through the Open College Network is offered but is not essential.

[1] Workbase Training specialises in the development of strategies and programmes to meet the training needs of the non-managerial workforce. (*Workbase Training*, 1995)

A survey of former R2L students (and the response rate of 81 per cent to a postal questionnaire speaks volumes for the commitment engendered by participation in the course) reveals the extent of penetration into groups others find 'hard to reach'.

Eighty per cent were women, 42 per cent were part-time workers. While 3.3 per cent earned between £15,000 and £25,000 per year, 76 per cent were earning less than £11,500 (Council of Europe decency threshold); 60 per cent had left school by the age of 15 and 91 per cent by age 16. Many were engaged in catering, domestic, care, clerical and manual work; the majority were aged between 36 and 55.

Only 10 per cent identified their main motive as immediately job-related while a staggering 72 per cent had motives like 'get back into education', 'gain confidence', 'show myself I still had a brain'.

The main purpose of the courses, from the union's point of view, reflected in the title, is to encourage people back into learning and 59 per cent of respondents had continued in some form of organised learning either within or outside the very broad offerings in UNISON's own Open College Scheme.

In any study of participation in work-based or work-related learning in Britain it is the low-paid, low-skilled, part-time, mainly women workers who miss out; and generally those in the lower socio-economic groups and those who leave school early are missing from all learning opportunities.

These are the people UNISON (and other unions) are attracting, retaining and motivating to progress in education and training. The evidence is there for all to see – and to learn from.

Employee Development Schemes

The last few years have seen a proliferation of Employee Development Schemes, following the groundbreaking activities of Ford, first in the USA and then in the UK. They vary considerably and may be single company or group-based but have some shared characteristics:

- participation is voluntary
- activities are mainly in employees' own time
- activities are additional to normal job-related training
- a wide range of activities are eligible (including what some would describe as 'non-vocational')
- employers pay all or most of the costs
- flexible learning methods are available.

Such schemes are often highly successful in bringing generally lower participating groups, especially male manual workers, into education and training. In a study of some dozen schemes undertaken by the Employment Department (NIACE, 1995) it was found that 50 per cent of participants would not have been pursuing their current learning if the scheme had not existed.

The Postcode Factor

In 1994 the Further Education Funding Council for Wales introduced into its recurrent-funding methodology an explicit 'widening participation factor' based on postcodes, in order to give special support to colleges which recruit and retain students from areas of high socio-economic deprivation. The widening participation element forms a secondary factor in Stage 1 (Recruitment) and Stage 2 (Learning) of the methodology. Only primary factors operate at Stage 3 (Attainment).

Stage 1 funding takes account of all activities associated with the recruitment of students – needs analysis, market research, promotion, advice, guidance, assessment. The 'widening participation factor is calculated in direct relation to the number of people recruited from areas of high socio-economic deprivation. This funding recognises the additional costs necessary for reaching new students. It also offers a financial incentive to colleges to reach beyond traditional learners' (FEFCW, 1995).

Stage 2 funding is mainly based on the volume of student learning activity and course programme delivery costs, including the student and learning support needed to retain students. Here again a widening participation factor, based on postcodes, is added to reflect the greater on-course support needed by some students from previously under-participating groups.

To reflect the particular circumstances of Wales, other secondary factors operate to reflect the additional costs of colleges operating in areas of very low density population and also those associated with developing, teaching and assessing programmes through the medium of Welsh.

The rationale for the 'postcode factor' is FEFCWs perception of a correlation 'between areas of high socio-economic deprivation and:

- low post-school participation in education
- high levels of non-completion
- basic skills deficiencies (FEFCW, 1995).

There are always complications in the gathering and comparability of data but the evidence seems to show an increase in the number of students from identified areas of 30 per cent between 1993/4 and 1994/5 with a 27.5 per cent increase in participation from the most disadvantaged areas.

NIACE has argued before that the postcode system may not be infallible and may not be the best, but has signalled a seriousness and determination about widening participation and using the funding methodology to do it.

Parents as Learners

When the Basic Skills Agency promoted its 'Read and Write Together' pack through BBC television it demonstrated once again the great latent interest in

learning among current non-participants and the power of that medium in reaching them. Not only did some 350,000 respond to the invitation to receive support in working with their children to help develop literacy, but an analysis of written returns reveals that above 50 per cent of respondents probably have themselves some literacy need – and that was among those who bothered to return a written response to the pack after ordering by telephone.

The willingness of parents to support their children's schooling is revealed as a huge untapped resource for schools and a massive motivator of under-achieving adults to concern themselves with education once again.

Of course there is much successful experience to be found outside England and Wales. The Council of Europe in its five-year project 'Adult Education and Social Change' studied projects and initiatives in more than a dozen European countries which were concerned with extending education to the long-term unemployed and to older adults. The experience of these projects, the results of European Commission programmes (e.g. ERGO, IRIS) and well-documented work from the United States are just some of the massive resources which lie ready to hand for study and the distillation of good practice.

In this chapter we have drawn attention to the accumulated knowledge (even 'wisdom') about how to widen participation already existing within some major national bodies and institutions. We have missed out many – the Workers' Educational Association, Adult Residential Colleges, the National Association for the Care and Re-Settlement of Offenders, the Co-operative Movement – these and many others have records of success in securing wider participation. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, countless individual colleges, adult education centres and local voluntary bodies are daily attracting students from the groups we have identified and providing in ways which meet the 'shared characteristics' of these students.

The first task is to apply on the widest possible scale what we already know.

Chapter Four

The Place of the Funding Methodology and the Challenge to the Kennedy Committee

The present paper is one of a series which has sought to raise the issue of participation and non-participation in the context of particular developments in public policy:

- the growth of employee development ideas
- the National Targets for Education and Training
- the Individual Commitment Initiative
- the expansion of Higher Education.

All have sought to take forward NIACE's central concern (manifested throughout its research, publications, conference and development activity) with improving, increasing and extending learning opportunities for those who have until now been excluded.

The new Further Education sector, established in 1992, deploys annual resources of £2.7 billion. It embraces some 450 further education, tertiary and sixth form colleges as well as 14 specialist designated institutions (including long-term residential adult education colleges, four central London adult education colleges and the Workers' Educational Association) and provides funding of the order of £49 million to 500 external institutions (mainly adult education centres) for education and training they provide which fall within the legislatively determined remit of the Further Education Funding Council.

As illustrated in Chapter 1 adult students now provide the bulk of the work in Further Education Colleges.

The Funding Council, through the institutions it funds, is a major player in the provision of education for adults in England. (The FEFCW and the bodies it funds play very similar roles in Wales.)

FEFC has developed a Funding Methodology which is the structure within which opportunities for learners in the sector are provided. The Council's keynote document at its inception was encouragingly entitled 'Funding Learning' (rather than 'Funding Colleges' or something similar) and considerable advances have been made for adult learners, with special consideration for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and a welcome simplification and country-wide application of a 'concessionary fees' policy for basic skills students and those on benefit.

Prior to college incorporation most public sector education for adults was provided through a block funding system where resources are provided, with or without a steer towards priorities, to provide a service on an annual basis and through targeting specified sums of money (often on a time-limited basis) to meet identified and strictly defined needs (ESF, other EU programmes, SRB, Section 11).

FEFC's Funding Methodology is a formula funding system which relates levels of resource to levels of delivery and seeks to create a common currency for the whole range of its further education offer. To make this formula fit the aspirations of those who would widen participation is the challenge to the Kennedy Committee. Higher Education has been expanded without any real change in the social composition of the student body (in fairness, it must be said that the gender balance has improved beyond recognition). Growth, not equity, was promised and growth has been delivered.

The establishment of the Widening Participation Committee holds out the promise that the expansion of FE will be handled differently.

As we have seen there are two distinct funding approaches to widening participation:

- to identify particular groups which are under-represented overall or in particular areas of the curriculum or particular kinds of institution and to target funding in some way directly at those groups
- to identify barriers to participation and concentrate on removing those so as to widen participation generally and in particular for those groups currently under-represented (by concentrating on their 'shared characteristics').

These different funding approaches are not mutually exclusive and nor are the different approaches to widening participation. It has been the ability to mix and match different funding sources and different approaches to widening participation that has been the key to the past relative flexibility of those providing for the education of adults. Any new approach to widening participation in FE should maximise the complementary effect of these different funding approaches. In practical terms this will mean maximising the potential of the funding formula to reduce barriers and provide incentives and then persuading the FEFC in England to supplement that with targeting and to encourage institutions to take full advantage of opportunities to bring in 'targeted' money from elsewhere, e.g. ESF, TECs.

Though primarily a 'funding' Council, FEFC is also responsible for the inspection of colleges and for strategic planning. These could be powerful tools in its hands, both in terms of widening participation and in resource allocation but they are not at present used in these ways. The inspection framework is concerned with organisational effectiveness and the assessment of service quality. By not acknowledging the context within which individual colleges are operating and the effectiveness or otherwise of a college response to that context inspection reports are almost bound to favour those facing or taking on the least challenging students and communities. For example almost every inner city college inspection report draws attention to 'poor retention rates'!

The strategic planning framework could also be used more explicitly to orient institutions towards questions of participation raised by local community considerations and could then link clearly with a new kind of 'organisational effectiveness' to be inspected.

Both could then usefully become factors feeding into that all- important 'bottom line'.

Some of those operating under the Further Education Funding Council methodology argue that it is itself a barrier to widening participation in that:

- it fails to allow for the effects of the inner-city or isolated rural dimensions
- it fails to compensate institutions for the necessary institutional investment to attract non-traditional participants generally
- it fails to compensate institutions for the institutional investment needed to attract groups currently under-represented in particular curriculum areas
- it fails to compensate institutions for the 'risk factors' of widening participation in terms of retention and 'non-achievement'
- it fails to compensate institutions for providing for/financing the particular needs of low income students (except partially for child care)
- it restricts the use of additional funding (e.g. European funding) which is explicitly designed to widen participation.

Overall, the 'convergence' of historical levels of funding is being pursued without proper recognition of the influence of the above factors on the current practice of institutions.

Such arguments clearly have an element of truth, but, as an overall condemnation of the methodology, they may fail to distinguish between its fundamental principles and its specific implementation. The methodology itself is an attempt at value neutrality. The specific implementation is a question of 'levers' which can be used either to widen or narrow participation.

The strength of the methodology is that, by using units of learning, it can be a flexible way of technically achieving several ends:

- differentiating between those aspects of historical funding that reflect genuine differences in provision and circumstances and those that reflect differing levels of local commitment and/or affluence in the past
- establishing a common currency to create an internal consistency between the various common aspects of the learning process even though they might occur to different extents in different types of provision
- basing funding on a balance of input and output aspects of the *learning* process
- working towards a form of funding which is free from arbitrary restrictions on the mode of attendance.

However, because using units is part of a general formula-based methodology it essentially allocates funding on the basis of the *average* student in the *average* college. It cannot easily allow for whole groups of students who fall outside the existing average (the special arrangements for SLDD students is the exception which illustrates this rule) or for institutions where such students predominate.

Within the new market economy of the post-16 sector these are issues which are left to institutions to resolve, with the consequence that they are likely to aim first at students where the risks and/or costs are average or below average. The encouragement to achieve growth targets will therefore widen participation only when such growth cannot be achieved by increasing market share of the traditional student population.

However, a welcome element of the funding methodology is the presence of compensating factors which are also built into the tariff. Such factors include units to compensate for the provision of childcare support and the units which provide for additional learning support for those with certain kinds of special needs. There is much scope for expanding on this established principle so that institutions are encouraged to provide the extra inputs which will be needed in:

- student support (childcare, transport, fees and materials)
- learning support (guidance, study skills, basic skills)

if the pursuit of the 'average' is not to lead over time to an actual narrowing of participation.

This issue of the 'average' is also relevant in considering the consequences of the push for a 'convergence' of funding levels. The differences in historical levels of funding between colleges may, in some cases, reflect fairly arbitrary decisions of the previous funders. They are just as likely to reflect considered local reaction to genuine differences in student populations and the costs of serving them which were recognised by the previous funding regime. The danger is that in pursuing convergence without first recognising and analysing these issues and adjusting the new funding regime to take account of them some institutions are being labelled as cost inefficient and pulled away from serving just those 'untypical' students who are now the subject of consideration by the Kennedy Committee.

It is already claimed by some colleges that these factors have pushed them into withdrawing from areas which the Kennedy Committee may well later exhort them to re-enter. The push towards convergence should, we feel, be halted until full consideration has been given to the mechanisms which will protect and extend provision for those students whose costs are genuinely and justifiably higher and remove the financial risk for those institutions which provide for them.

➤ No further measures of convergence should be taken until after the report of the Widening Participation Committee has been considered.

Within the FEFC methodology, units are available for four elements of the learning process. These are:

- entry – those activities related to recruiting, placing and guiding students
- on programme – those activities related to the learning process
- achievement – the outcomes actually achieved by participants
- compensating factors which are applied to various of the above elements.

Whether or not the allocation of a number of units for a particular activity encourages a widening or narrowing of participation is a question of implementation and the relativities between these elements rather than an effect of the methodology itself.

The Entry Element

The first issue of implementation is the size of the entry element relative to the total unit earning capacity of a particular programme. The greater the proportion of the entry element the higher the compensation for investment in outreach, smaller class sizes in accessible locations or non-traditional curriculum areas, increased initial guidance and support, and less important the risk to the institution of losing 'on-programme' because particular students are forced, through economic or social pressures, to leave the programme.

Table 7 Entry element as a percentage of basic total units (at cost weighting factor B)

Unit Band	Entry Units	%
1	4	34
2	4	19
3	8	19
4	8	13
5	8	9
6	8	5

Source: Extrapolated from Appendix 1 to Annex A *How to apply for Funding 1996/7*, FEFC.

It is a welcome feature that the entry units are in inverse proportion to programme length since this reflects the need to ensure good entry programmes for all students.

However, the current arrangements for entry units do not fully compensate institutions for the financial risks involved in serving people with our 'shared characteristics', for whom the initial investment is likely to be high and, because of social and economic pressures, the risk of early leaving is also that much greater.

For many adults the predominant and crucial first re-entry point is likely to be in load band 2 (2–4 hours per week per year).

➤ **The entry units for load band two should be increased, perhaps to 6 units, to compensate for additional expense and risk factors involved when 'non-traditional' students are recruited.**

At present, if a student joins **and leaves** a programme between census dates (November, February, May) no on-programme or entry units may be claimed. This can also be a disincentive to investment in non-traditional students.

➤ **Entry units should be claimable for all verifiable 'entry' activity and investment.**

Beyond these adjustments to the methodology there is a clear case for encouragement, within the entry unit mechanism, for institutions to target certain hard-to-reach groups and the postcode system of identifying areas of socio-economic deprivation is the best general method of doing this so far devised.

➤ **Additional entry units should be claimable for the recruitment of specified target groups using the 'post-code system' or something equally effective.**

The On-programme Element

On-programme units are a large part of the overall units for a programme (especially when taking into account weighting factors for particular programme areas). As a temporary measure after incorporation programmes were allocated to load bands which identified the number of units for programmes of a specified number of learning hours. This allowed institutions to earn units for the actual programmes that they deemed appropriate for their students. The FEFC's current objective is to 'individually list' as many qualification aims as possible and to allocate them a particular number of units without regard to the actual learning hours for any individual programme (this system is often referred to as 'mode-free'). The determination of an appropriate number of units for a particular qualification inevitably involves some view of what number of hours students currently take to achieve that qualification. The notion of an 'average' is therefore also built in to this element and any attempt to widen participation will need to counteract the consequent temptation to concentrate recruitment efforts on students who are likely to need no more than the average 'time to completion'.

One way might be to revert entirely to the load banding procedure and allow resources to follow actual learning hours. However, a mode-free system is in the interests of most adult students – they attend part-time and there would be a disincentive to recruitment of adults overall if part-time and short course study *per se* attracted lower funding than full-time and longer courses.

Indeed NIACE has argued consistently against current distortions in the mode-free system whereby some qualifications (including GCSEs) are given a much lower unit return if they are studied as part of a programme of less than 450 hours (15 hours per 30 week year). This anomaly has meant that it is often in an institution's interest to offer courses which require attendance just above the 15 hour mark when attendance below this level is precisely that which is often required by adult students because of their social, family and economic circumstances and the lack of financial support. The mode-free principle has, rightly in our view, been applied in the case of APL and should be applied consistently in the interests of the bulk of non-traditional students.

➤ **The same 'mode-free' rules should apply to all individually listed courses and no distinction should be made between 'part-time' and 'full-time' modes of attendance.**

However, in both cases, the mode-free principle which serves the interest of average and above-average adult students has a disincentive effect when applied

to those who need more on-programme tutorial support and are likely to take a greater time to achieve.

Some qualification routes are known to be particularly appropriate and popular for adult first stage re-entry students.

➤ **The cost-weighting factor currently applied to literacy and numeracy course should be extended to other designated courses catering for adult re-entry students.**

'On programme' units cease to be earned from the census point after a student leaves the programme without completing. This introduces within FE funding a kind of penalty for low completion rates. However, as has already been pointed out, for many of the students who need to be attracted if participation is to be widened, 'drop out' is not always a function of factors over which the institution has any control (social and economic pressures, problems of unemployment, the lack of discretionary awards). The institution which has taken the 'risk' of widening participation to students who are disadvantaged by these factors is therefore penalised.

➤ **Consideration should be given to weighting the on-programme units towards the beginning of a programme.**

The Achievement Element

At present the units earned for achievement make up between 5 and 10 per cent of the basic total. There have been proposals to increase this proportion in order to raise achievement levels. This would again encourage institutions to favour recruitment of students expected to be average or above-average for achievement and thereby discourage widening participation where this outcome is less certain.

➤ **The proportion of 'achievement' to total units should not be increased.**

Another area of considerable debate is what should count as 'achievement'. At present this is restricted to the gaining of qualifications or progression to other education or training. Because its primary remit is to increase the level of education and training, the Further Education Funding Council has understandably decided not to count gaining employment as an achievement in itself. Unfortunately this does not accord with the primary objective of education (and the economic reality) for many of the students among whom participation needs to be increased. Nor, incidentally, does it seem to be entirely consonant with the current 'mission' of the Department for Education and Employment which is 'to support economic growth and improve the nation's competitiveness and quality of life by raising standards of educational achievement and skill and by promoting an efficient and flexible labour market'. Often students leave early and without a final qualification because they have achieved, frequently through the support, skills and confidence-building of the institution, their primary objective of employment. Even without a qualification such a positive experience of education increases the chances of that student's returning for more education and training in future.

➤ The gaining of employment by students should attract achievement units.

Compensating Factors

There are currently three different compensating arrangements built into the methodology. Each of these in its way encourages a widening of participation. Two of them may be seen as 'student support' and the other as 'learning support'. The suggestions we make for the other elements of the methodology are mainly concerned to provide incentives or remove disincentives to institutions making extra efforts to serve the needs of previously under-participating groups. It is within the 'compensating factors' that opportunities present themselves for removing some of the barriers which individuals from these groups often find standing in their way and for easing the path of those who, at least initially, find learning (and certainly study) difficult and even alien.

Fee Remission

Fee remission units at approximately one third of on-programme units are available for students in certain categories and who are given full tuition fee remission by the institution. This is a clearly targeted area of unit funding and currently applies to:

- full-time 1619 students
- unemployed students
- students receiving a means tested benefit
- the unwaged dependants of the above
- students on literacy, numeracy or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) courses.

The possibility of fee remission on this scale as a national policy must be seen as one of the great gains for adult students which stemmed from incorporation, and the recent generous interpretation of the rules in favour of asylum-seekers on benefit is another positive signal from FEFC to those seeking to extend participation. (The proposed removal of many asylum-seekers from eligibility for benefit is, of course, a matter outside FEFC's control.)

However, there remain considerable financial barriers for people on benefit:

- examination fees
- books and materials
- travel and subsistence

and for some people outside the means-tested benefit categories such as:

- low waged workers and their dependants
- certain people with disabilities and learning difficulties who receive non-means-tested benefits

who may also be unable to meet fees and other costs.

Of course colleges retain discretion over an extended fee remission policy but only a central steer is likely to prompt the less committed in this direction while convergence and efficiency-gain policies are all pushing in the other. In the case of examination fees, the institution even stands to lose possible achievement units where students find themselves unable to pay.

➤ **Compensation for fee remission should be extended to all those on low incomes and to cover examination fees.**

Remission units, unlike fees, can only be claimed alongside on-programme units per census date attending. When a fee paying student leaves early the college keeps the fee but when a 'fee remission' student leaves the institution loses not only the on programme units but the remission units as well.

➤ **Remission units should be earned alongside entry units and be 'payable' at enrolment like fees rather than distributed throughout the programme.**

Childcare

The second 'student support' compensating factor is the compensation for the provision of free childcare for the children of students eligible for remission of fees. This is set at the same unit rate as remission itself and therefore is not intended to fully compensate the institution for such costs but rather to make some recognition of the investment that has been made.

This is only a first step in recognising that family responsibilities are one of the greatest inhibitors upon adult students who wish to commit themselves to education and training. One of the clearest statements FEFC could make of its intention to open up further education to all adults would be to take central responsibility for the essential childcare costs of students on low incomes.

➤ **Free childcare should be available to all students (of whatever age) on low incomes and the real cost should be reflected in the units reclaimable.**

Additional Learning Support

The third compensating factor is 'learning support', where units are allocated against actual cost bands for individual students who have additional learning support needs over and above those of the rest of their student cohort. The minimum cost levels which qualify for compensation assume that the additional support needs of some students will be balanced out by the lesser needs of others.

There are two mains aspects of learning support which require investigation in respect of widening participation other than those which are being considered by the Tomlinson Committee. Firstly, is the lowest band of additional support low enough to provide for the language, literacy and numeracy support of large numbers of students without placing an undue burden on those institutions who either do or wish to make special efforts to include such students (thus possibly cancelling out the 'balancing effect')? How can the additional support

mechanism cope where a whole student cohort in a particular programme requires that additional support?

➤ **An urgent study is needed of the current working of the additional learning support mechanism with a view to improving its operation outside the 'Tomlinson' categories.**

The kinds of suggestion for changes in the FEFC Funding Methodology made in this chapter have, in the past, been met by two sets of objections. Firstly, it is argued that this approach does not in itself bring in any new money to widen participation and therefore, by increasing the numbers of units in the system, only dilutes the existing value of units. Secondly, it is argued that much of this is irrelevant anyway because, as institutions continue to be pressed for growth, they will be forced to look outside the 'safe' markets to widen participation even without encouragement and compensation for the risk involved.

It is true that without extra money the approaches outlined will, by increasing the number of units, dilute their overall value. However, even with that dilution there would be a partial redistribution to those institutions widening or intending to widen participation from those who are not. At the very least a framework would be created within which the pressures of convergence and efficiency gains did not threaten to encourage a narrowing of participation.

The argument that pressures for growth and the market itself will encourage the widening of participation is only partially, if at all, true. Without some of the adjustments outlined above the first aim of any institution seeking growth (or survival) in the new FE market place is likely to be to increase its market share of 'safe', low-cost, high-unit earning students. This can create considerable wasteful aggressive competition over the existing student population. Only after having achieved high market share might such an institution turn its attention to widening participation. In the meantime the task of seeking to widen participation will be left to those who because of commitment, lack of success in the prestige stakes, or geographical location do not devote all their energies to expanding their market share of 'safe' students. Unfortunately, these institutions under the current arrangements are likely to be operating from an increasingly weak base and could be the first to suffer during increasing financial stringency.

It is our contention that one of the tasks of the Kennedy Committee should be to ensure that opportunities to participate in FEFC-funded learning should no longer be even partly determined by accident of geography, historical funding or the degree of benevolent intention of individual college managements.

We believe that, by taking the kind of steps to change the operation of the methodology which we propose and by allowing targeted funding from other sources (ESF, central and local government, TECs) to be complementary and fully additional to formula funding a significant extension in opportunity can be made for those currently excluded.

Chapter Five

Wider Still and Wider

The Kennedy Committee intends to report in early 1997 and Chapter 4 has attempted to seize the occasion by discussing the funding of FE at some length and making detailed suggestions which could be implemented almost immediately. Yet, as Chapter 1 points out, adults study in the widest possible range of institutions and non-institutional settings and, in all cases where measurement is done, similar issues of exclusion arise. There is a role for all providers and funders in the process of widening participation.

Local Education Authorities were, for long, the major providers of educational opportunity for adults through 'their' colleges, adult centres, community schools and community services; a major focus for other learning bodies through their support and encouragement of voluntary organisations and a major source of financial support for students returning to 'serious' learning through the discretionary awards schemes.

The 1944 Education Act placed upon LEAs a statutory duty to secure adequate facilities for the education of adults and that duty has been maintained by the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act for all those activities which fall outside Schedule 2 of the Act. The duty to secure 'sufficient' facilities for Schedule 2 activity now lies with the FEFC. While the operation of the Act has undoubtedly strengthened services for those wishing to pursue certificated courses, those needing basic skills help or English as a second language and those with learning difficulties or disabilities it had been one of a number of factors reducing the ability or willingness of LEAs to provide comprehensive services. The extent, range and quality of adult education provided by the LEAs has always been patchy. It has varied in quality, volume and accessibility. At its worst it has been hard to find; it has sometimes been inaccessible to those unable to pay high fees; it has sometimes had difficulty distinguishing the practice of leisure activities from the learning of them. But at its best it has provided a wide range of high quality learning especially in those areas of life which lie outside the workplace and has reached into all parts of the community. In our view it has also had the advantage of being ultimately controlled by that least worst of systems of governance – it has been democratically accountable.

There are many arguments for the generous supply of general education opportunities in a free and prosperous society. In the context of widening participation the most important are that non-certificated learning is likely to feel less threatening to some of those who fear that education is not for them and that they would 'fail' any test they were set. Local Authority adult education certainly can act as a 'feeder' into certificated work and in many places this is acknowledged in the relationship between college and LEA. Some groups of potential students are offered 'threshold' activity with the clear intent of moving on as has proved successful with certain women's groups. (This is not the same as the current glib assumption in some quarters that all such transfers are 'progression'. The study of local history and an NVQ in plumbing are both valid

activities in their own right and to move from one to the other, in either direction, should not be seen as progression.)

The local authority is often successful in reaching out in the physical sense of utilising buildings it controls throughout the community and is particularly well placed to capitalise on the motivating effect that engagement with their children's education can have upon parents.

For countless numbers of the isolated and culturally impoverished, for those living remote from conventional centres of learning and, perhaps above all, for older people and others with no practical likelihood or intention of joining or re-joining the workforce local authority services have often provided a lifeline, a support, a centre for convivial and joyous learning. These are legitimate forms of participation in a learning society.

Since 1944 Education Authorities have had a duty to 'secure adequate facilities' yet successive Secretaries of State have refused to define adequacy and many local authorities have acted as though the provision of further education for adults were a power not a duty.

➤ The DfEE should issue a circular clarifying the minimum levels of service to be considered 'adequate'.

The kinds of education currently provided by local education authorities need to be strengthened, expanded and improved if there is to be any hope of extending participation into that 30 per cent of the population now in danger of being marginalised and excluded from education and training as from so much else. Yet a succession of blows, delivered either intentionally or unintentionally have seriously weakened these services in recent years.

Financial pressures on local authorities have led to reductions in spending in many places resulting in lower volume of provision, higher fees or, more commonly, both (NIACE, 1992,1993, 1994, 1995). LEAs have felt under pressure to devote the maximum possible budget to their schools to minimise the financial attractions of opting out and this has been at the expense of the other LEA services. One effect of the 1992 Act has been to weaken the infrastructure as Further Education Divisions of LEAs, within which there was often room for inspectors and officers specialising or with a special interest in the education of adults, have been closed down and residual 'adult' duties absorbed by staff with other, often more pressing, responsibilities. Another effect has been to weaken the attraction of adult education to many concerned local politicians as their 'flagship' services like literacy work or provision for those with special needs, often built up painfully in battles for resources over many years, have been removed, making it more easy, but no more accurate, to caricature adult education as 'tap-dancing on the rates'.

The break up of some of the large county authorities in England (and all authorities in Wales) into smaller unitaries threatens a further round of infrastructure losses as the size of services reduces further and they are even less able to justify such calls upon diminished budgets. NIACE and the Local Authority Associations have embarked this year on the kind of exercise to collect nationally compatible data about levels of provision in localities which would be necessary if the adequacy of provision were to be objectively assessed.

➤ **Government should lend its support to the collection of nationally compatible data on levels of provision in each local authority area in order to underpin the force of the proposed circular.**

Ultimately the cause of widening participation will be best served by a re-integration of the further education curriculum and some co-ordination of provision in localities and regions (the word 'planning' might even claw its way back from the margins to which the recent dominance of free market ideas has pushed it). These are contentious, even politically charged, issues but it is clear that, for example, college efforts to widen participation are hampered by the lack of direct funding for 'non-schedule 2' courses and undermined by weaknesses in local authority services and authorities' inability to provide discretionary awards even on the pre-1992 scale which NIACE always considered inadequate. Both local authorities and FEFC regional committees have the potential to be co-ordinators of provision (and there are probably other candidates) but, however the issue is resolved, the current climate of competition over the 'safe bet' students and the scramble for accreditation which characterise some (by no means all) parts of the system are no aid to any meaningful widening of participation.

➤ **Mechanisms should be developed for the co-ordination of the whole local or regional publicly supported further education offer and the current position of having different funding regimes for schedule 2 and non-schedule 2 work should be ended.**

There are voluntary bodies which play very similar roles to those of LEAs and many have gone through similar experiences in recent years. The very largest, operating on a national scale, have been able to make their own accommodations with funding and regulatory bodies and continue to make their distinctive contributions. To deal with their triumphs and tribulations would take a book on its own.

It must suffice to say here that some voluntary organisations have shown exceptional skills in bringing in groups of the hardest to reach students and that those skills must be harnessed in the general effort to widen participation. Much voluntary effort is very localised and the wish to serve a particular locality, estate or even block of flats can be a strong motivator of voluntary effort as can the idealism of self-help groups based, for example, on churches, black communities or former coalfields. It is in the nature of such groups that they may be ephemeral, may take risks and may seem to be a risk to potential funders with one eye on expanding participation but the other on the auditors.

These local voluntary organisations may not fit easily into structures like the FEFC's funding methodology even when their provision, or parts of it, fall within the schedule 2 boundaries and while local education authorities, with their duty to 'secure the provision' of further education not to provide it, continue to be a major source of support that possibility is diminishing in the same way and for the same reasons as their directly provided services.

Participation in education and training is not only about people following conventional courses in conventional settings and wide participation will require that 'new' students find their ways to learning through routes and organisations which seem appropriate to them. Sometimes these routes will lead them back to

conventional settings, sometimes they will wish to remain where they are and sometimes they will even wish to change the mainstream but some of the changes which will be needed to bring about a truly learning society will be found among the untidy, creative, risk-taking voluntary organisations.

Co-ordinating mechanisms should include voluntary bodies in their remit and mainstream funding should be available for their work where its standards and quality merit it.

NIACE's Policy Discussion Paper *An Adult Higher Education* set out our overall view of that sector as it was in November 1993 and there is no intention, in a few paragraphs, to replace that. The expansion of the last decade has put Britain on a par with most of our immediate competitors as far as 'graduate output' is concerned and has enabled a massively increased number of adults to enter higher education mainly as part-time students but also as full-timers.

However, this expansion has not changed fundamentally the social composition of the student body and, as the expenditure on student awards for those studying on full-time degree courses passes £1.25 billion the anomalies and unfairness of the current situation are highlighted. The 'new' student body, which a genuinely widened participation would encompass, will require that 'their' forms of participation – part-time, intermittent, mixed mode – are also eligible for support. The predominance of mature students in further and higher education ought to mean that the current system of concentrating almost all state support on full-time 16–19-year-olds in FE (via total fee remission) and on full-time first degree students in HE (fees plus maintenance plus privileged loan) is no longer tenable.

➤ **Student support for fees and maintenance should be harmonised across post-compulsory education and part-time students should be treated equitably with full-time.**

This would end the current concentration of public support for study on those most likely to gain most personal benefit from it.

Table 8 Support for students after age 16: estimated expenditure 1993–94

	£m
Mandatory Awards (full-time HE)	2,747
Discretionary Awards (HE and FE)	222
Student Loans (full-time HE)	283
Career Development Loans (FE and HE)	40

Source: National Commission on Education (1995) *Learning to Succeed: the way ahead.*

The recent proposal to levy an 'entry fee' to universities, setting up an immediate and highly visible financial deterrent to poorer students, may be helpful if it finally crystallises thinking around the current need to finance a larger and more expensive higher education system than was ever envisaged by Robbins. The

'Learning Bank' idea, current in both Labour and Liberal Democrat thinking (and not entirely divorced from the 'voucher' and learning account ideas canvassed by more right-wing thinkers) offers a way forward. This would entail contributions from the state, the employer where possible and the individual into individual learning accounts which, in the case of most young full-time students for example, would often be overdrawn during the period of study and repaid when the individual's income reached an agreed level (Commission on Social Justice, 1994; Liberal Democrats, 1996).

We fully endorse the Liberals' view that 'individuals should pay back only when they can afford to do so'. We are attracted to the Australian Higher Education Contribution Scheme, which seems to ensure that those who can pay back do so while those who cannot (graduate unemployment is a fact and some graduates are still attracted to vocations which offer very meagre earthly returns) are not debt driven into greater poverty.

➤ The present system of student finance (fees, grants, loans) should be replaced by a 'learning bank' and something similar to the Australian Higher Education Contribution Scheme.

The Borrie report saw that this method of funding linked logically with a new national qualifications and credit framework:

> *Instead of the traditional emphasis on young academic students, the Learning Bank would be available to people throughout their lives ... This would allow individuals to learn when appropriate to them and in the form appropriate to them ... The precondition for a new flexible funding system is a shift in the organisation of learning to a modular system of credits. The accumulation of credits by students would drive the system. The credits would form the building blocks of lifelong learning ... and would create what David Robertson calls 'a ladder of progression' through further education, higher education and vocational learning. A credit-based achievement structure of this kind would be the basis for the funding structure of the Learning Bank* (Commission on Social Justice, 1994; Robertson, 1995).

A great deal of ingenuity has been shown by tutors, institutions and funding agencies to create coherent progression routes. Open College Networks, the Further Education Development Agency, Fforum in Wales have all contributed but the work needs bringing to fruition.

➤ The creation of a comprehensive national credit framework embracing all current qualification systems should now be a priority.

Whether the work is done together or separately we believe that these proposals should be on the table at least by the time that the Dearing enquiry into the funding of Higher Education reports.

> *Much of the evidence that voluntary employer funding of training and education is missing the mark in relation to the changing nature of the workforce, the achievement of the National Targets as expressed in terms of whole qualifications, and the likely future skills and knowledge needs of the economy has been accumulated by employers themselves* (CBI, 1994).

The argument in the CBI's excellent publication on training and the flexible

workforce seems to be leading inexorably towards the conclusion that the voluntary system is failing and needs to be replaced. That they do not draw this conclusion is regrettable but not surprising. More surprising is the recent adoption by the Labour Party of a policy of purely voluntary employer contributions to training and we await with interest the detail of how they propose to ensure that the needs of the less-skilled, part-time, temporary, women and black workers are to be equitably met under such a system.

NIACE has consistently argued that participation in employer funded learning will only be genuinely widened if those employers who do not voluntarily contribute to the development of the whole of their workforce are statutorily obliged to do so both by financial contribution and by embedding an entitlement to 'time off for learning' in statute (NIACE, 1990; Tuckett, 1991; NIACE, 1993; Uden, 1994).

➤ **All firms should be obliged to devote 1.25 per cent of payroll to schemes of education and training open to the whole workforce.**

Such schemes could be single employer-based, collective in a locality or industry or trade group, bought in or otherwise organised through third parties.

➤ **At the same time a universal entitlement, equivalent to five paid days per year for a full-time worker plus five unpaid, should be introduced.**

Of course such an entitlement would need to be cash limited and targeted in order to be affordable. But by concentrating on those who have benefited least from education and training in the past and by learning from the experience of, for example, Germany and some Scandinavian countries, a very real contribution to bringing in so far unconvinced workers could be made.

Finally, and all too briefly, we need to acknowledge the tremendous contribution broadcasting has made and can make to the learning of those who, so far, have found other forms of post school provision unattractive. The 1990 Broadcasting Act ended the obligation on terrestrial independent television companies to provide educational programming for adults. Yet all the evidence points to the important part that television can play. It is free at the point of use in people's homes, and is a familiar and unthreatening medium. The adult literacy campaign of the 1970s was kick-started by prime-time television, through BBC's *On the Move*. Adult Learners' Week each year includes programming on all channels backed by a freephone helpline, attracting some 50,000 people, more than half of whom are unemployed, to phone seeking opportunities for adult learning. An impressive number turn the enquiry into active enrolment. The BBC/ALBSU Family Literacy adverts in 1995 stimulated 350,000 people to phone for family literacy packs. Terrestrial television is still a major influence on the lives of Britain's adults, and is likely to remain so.

➤ **The Government should use the current planned legislation changing ownership rules in the media, to reintroduce an obligation on Channel 3 companies to provide a minimum of prime time programming for adult learners, whilst maintaining an obligation on the BBC and Channel 4 to provide accessible programming for adult learners during prime time.**

The coalition which will be needed to bring about a learning society is even wider than can be covered in this short chapter. The danger is that, as in the nightmare of the spinning plates, just as we seem to be getting one thing right another finally falls flat.

- Government should convene an over-arching advisory body to advise on the ways policy and practice in further, higher, adult and community education may be harmonised to meet the shared purposes expressed in the National Targets and elsewhere.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This paper is published during the European Year of Lifelong Learning. 1996 is also the year in which the Government has issued a Consultative Document on Lifetime Learning and the European Commission its White Paper *Towards a Learning Society*. The CBI has weighed in with *Realising the Vision* and the TUC has published *Funding Lifelong Learning – A Strategy to Deliver the National Education and Training Targets*. Even the Higher Education Funding Council has had its 'Widening Provision' initiative.

People in positions of power and influence seem to be publicly committed to an expansion of participation in learning among adults – a policy of inclusion.

Yet the reality for many continues to be exclusion either through lack of genuine opportunity or because most of this simply passes them by – 'Education's for Other People'.

The paper argues that the operation of some overall policies:

- reductions in local authority finance
- convergence and efficiency gains in further education
- capital and other reductions in higher education
- the ending of the mature student allowance
- the operation of the 16/21 Hour Rule

is in danger of squeezing out those who need to be brought in – those with family commitments, those unable to pay fees, the unemployed, older people. It argues that systems for the purchase and delivery of training are not adapting fast enough to the changing nature of the workforce. It concludes that the continuing bias in further and higher education (through the student support system in one case and through free tuition and the persistence of mode differentials in the other) in favour of full-time students re-inforces the distorted class composition of the student body and the persistent tendency to offer most to those who have already had most.

It suggests that the increasing difficulty of funding any but qualification bearing courses is reducing opportunities for those who want to 'see if I still have a brain' before embarking on anything more serious and certainly will not allow what the Government calls 'all our people' to participate. The paper further argues that current simple, even naive, interpretations of vocationalism lead away from the vision of a knowledge-based economy and towards a workforce which would be a competent servicing agency to cutting edge economies located elsewhere.

However, we also argue that the skills, knowledge and understandings necessary to meet the challenge of Widening Participation already, in large measure, exist.

We have been here before. Through countless neighbourhood and local projects and campaigns and in the kinds of large-scale initiatives described briefly in Chapter 3 the tools have been assembled.

Of course there is always more to learn but if the current tide of public concern leads to no more than further research and narrowly focused experiment instead of modifications in the rules, methodologies and structures within which we operate then education and training professionals will have fallen into the trap of re-interpreting their world when the challenge was to change it.

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Widening Participation

Routes to a Learning Society

A Policy Discussion Paper

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (England and Wales) is the national organisation for adult learning. It is active in research, development, publications, seminars, conferences and in organising Adult Learners' Week. NIACE works closely with colleges, TECs and employers, as well as with local authorities and national government. NIACE plays a central role in advising on developments in policy and practice in all forms of education and training for adults, promoting equal opportunities of access for all.

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